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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

A MERCURY PUBLICATION

First Prize Winner

AVRAM DAVIDSON

The Necessity of His Condition

Every Story in This Issue NEW

Georges Simenon

Charles B. Child

Margery Allingham

Richard Connell

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

including **BLACK MASK MAGAZINE**

EVERY STORY IN THIS ISSUE — *NEW!*

FIRST PRIZE WINNER

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Complete List of the 60 Prize-Winning Stories in EQMM's Twelfth Annual Contest

THE BEST DETECTIVE-CRIME-MYSTERY SHORT STORIES OF 1957

FIRST PRIZE

The Necessity of His Condition by Avram Davidson

SPECIAL AWARD OF MERIT

Lilith, Stay Away From the Door by B. J. R. Stolper

SECOND PRIZES

(alphabetically by authors' names)

And Already Lost . . . by Charlotte Armstrong
Dig That Crazy Grave! by Robert Bloch
You Can't Run Away by Ray Chesson
The Faith of Aaron Menefee by Stanley Ellin
Malice in Wonderland by Rufus King
Cottage for August by Thomas Kyd
An End to Fear by Hugh Pentecost
Driving Lesson by F. L. Wallace
The Mayor Calls His Family by Manly Wade Wellman

HONOR ROLL

(alphabetically by authors' names)

Adventure of the Martian Crown Jewels by Poul Anderson
The Darkened Stair by Shirley Barker
The Demon Scientist Strikes Again! by Kem Bennett
Miss Phipps Goes to School by Phyllis Bentley
The Silver Cones by Leslie Bigelow
The Dog That Came to the Funeral by John Collier
Third Degree by Cecil Curtis
A Matter of Public Notice by Dorothy Salisbury Davis
Walking Alone by Miriam Allen deFord
Saint-Germain the Deathless by Lillian de la Torre
Stop Being a Sucker by G. C. Edmondson

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The Hungry Look	by Matthew Gant
Don't Crowd Your Luck	by William Campbell Gault
Snap Shot	by Michael Gilbert
Bull in a China Shop	by C. B. Gilford
Power of the Moon	by Arthur Gordon
The Serafina Caper	by Charles Green
Out of the Midst of the Fire	by Evans Harrington
Never Kill a Cop	by Clifford Knight
Doors in the Mind	by Alan E. Nourse
The High, Warm Place	by William O'Farrell
So Refreshing!	by Brèni Pevehouse
Symbol of Authority	by Henry Slesar
The Doe and the Gantlet	by Pat Stadley
The Birdwatcher	by L. A. G. Strong
The Town Is Waiting	by Joseph Whitehill

SPECIAL AWARDS FOR "FIRST STORIES"

BEST OF THE YEAR

The Kachina Dolls by Alvin Pevehouse

RUNNERS-UP

(alphabetically by authors' names)

The Liquidation of Pickle Fat	by John Barden
Tough Break	by Ryam Beck
The Mind Reader	by Fred Berkenhoff
The Man at the Latch	by Jacqueline Cutlip
So I Can Forget	by De Forbes
Now I Lay Me Down	by Ruth Doyle
Paid in Full	by Rose Finnegan
And the Desert Shall Blossom	by Loren Good
The Last Week	by A. Harris
Voluntary Murder	by Ernest Harrison
Last Laugh	by Stella Ripley
Waiting for the Dawn	by Stanley Rosen
Five Letter Word	by Jeanne Sakol
Never the Twain	by Andrew Salmond

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Command Performance	by J. Burne Sargent
Where There's a Will	by Gilbert Schechtman
A True Blue Friend	by Millicent Sherwood
Kelman's Eyes	by Simon Still
Man of the Week	by Charles M. Swart
Never Anything But Trouble	by Robert Twohy
Home From Camp	by Bob Van Scoyk
A Way With Women	by Nicholson Williams

Avram Davidson, winner of First Prize in EQMM's Twelfth Annual Contest, will be 34 years old this coming April. He was born and raised in Yonkers, New York, educated in local public schools, spent four years in college (at four different colleges), and ran the gamut of those odd jobs so often found in the patchwork background of "born writers"—sheep herder, hotel clerk, teacher of English to foreigners, factotum in a live poultry market, field hand on a truck farm, and assistant editor on an obscure and now-extinct periodical. During World War II he was a Hospital Corpsman, first with Naval Air, then with the Fifth Marines, seeing service in the South Pacific, China, North Africa, and Europe. At one time he had the only beard licensed by the Marines—he still has the beard. While in the armed services he began to write seriously, and his first novel was lost at sea. He boasts no hobbies (which is surprising), has few ambitions beyond writing (which is not surprising), is unmarried (but still hopeful), and again lives in the city of Yonkers.

Undoubtedly, Mr. Davidson is one of the most versatile writers ever to appear in EQMM. He has the astonishing knack of being able to write about any geographical background, and about any culture, ancient or modern, alien or native—and always with the most startling authenticity. The locale of his first story for EQMM was Cyprus; his second story (yet to be published) unfolds in a fourth-rate California hotel; his third roamed North Africa; and now—in his First Prize winner—he takes us to the South of 1850. Pre-Civil War—yet you will find "The Necessity of His Condition" (the perfect title for this fine, distinguished story) as up-to-date and

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universal as the struggle for human rights which is now seething all over the free and un-free world.

A born storyteller, Mr. Davidson has recast apparently familiar materials and achieved both originality and impact. With deceptive simplicity, with perception and artistry, he has struck at the heart of the problem, bringing the whole question of "the dignity of man" into a new, sharp, and revealing focus.

Could any contemporary theme have a greater significance these troubled days?

THE NECESSITY OF HIS CONDITION

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

SHOLTO HILL WAS MOSTLY RESIDENtial property, but it had its commercial district in the shape of Persimmon Street and Rampart Street, the latter named after some long-forgotten barricade stormed and destroyed by Benedict Arnold (wearing a British uniform and eaten with bitterness and perverted pride). Persimmon Street, running up-slope, entered the middle of Rampart at right angles, and went no farther. This section, with its red brick houses and shops, its warehouses and offices, was called The T, and it smelled of tobacco and potatoes and molasses and goober peas and dried fish and beer and cheap cookshop food and (the spit-and-whittle humorists claimed) old man Bailiss's office, where the windows were never opened—never had *been* opened, they said, never were *made* to be opened. Any smell off the street or farms or stables that found its way up to Bailiss's office was imprisoned there for life, they said. Old man Bailiss knew what they said, knew pretty much everything that went on anywhere; but he purely didn't care. He didn't have to, they said.

J. Bailiss, Attorney-at-Law (his worn old sign said), had a large practice and little competition. James Bailiss, Broker (his newer, but by no means new, sign), did an extensive business; again, with little competition. The premises of the latter business were located, not in The T, but in a whitewashed stone structure with thick doors and barred windows, down in The Bottom—as it was called—near the river, the canal, and the railroad line. James Bailiss, Broker, was not received socially. Nobody expected that bothered him much. Nothing bothered old man Bailiss much—Bailiss, with his old white hat and his old black coat and his old cowhide shoes that looked old even when they were new—turned old on the shoemaker's last

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(the spit-and-whittle crowd claimed) directly they heard whose feet they were destined for.

It was about twenty-five years earlier, in 1825, that an advertisement—the first of its kind—appeared in the local newspaper.

"*Take Notice!* (it began). James Bailiss, having lately purchased the old arsenal building on Canal Street, will henceforth operate it as a Negro Depot. He will at all times be found ready to purchase all good and likely young Negroes at the Highest Price. He will also attend to Selling Negroes on Commission. Said Broker also gives Notice that those who have Slaves rendered unfit for labor by yaws, scrofula, chronic consumption, rheumatism, & C., may dispose of them to him on reasonable terms."

Editor Winstanley tried to dissuade him, he said later. "Folks," he told him, "won't like this. This has never been said out open before," the editor pointed out. Bailiss smiled. He was already middle-aged, had a shiny red face and long mousy hair. His smile wasn't a very wide one.

"Then I reckon I must be the pioneer," he said. "This isn't a big plantation State, it never will be. I've give the matter right much thought. I reckon it just won't pay for anyone to own more than half a dozen slaves in these parts. But they will multiply, you can't stop it. I've seen it in my law work, seen many a planter broke for debts he's gone into to buy field hands—signed notes against his next crop, or maybe even his next three crops. Then maybe the crop is so good that the price of cotton goes way down and he can't meet his notes, so he loses his lands *and* his slaves. If the price of cotton should happen to be high enough for him to pay for the slaves he's bought, then, like a dumned fool" —Bailiss never swore—"why, he signs notes for a few more. Pretty soon things get so bad you can't *give* slaves away round here. So a man has a dozen of them eating their heads off and not even earning grocery bills. No, Mr. Winstanley: slaves must be sold south and southwest, where the new lands are being opened up, where the big plantations are."

Editor Winstanley wagged his head. "I know," he said, "I know. But folks don't like to say things like that out loud. The slave trade is looked down on. You know that. It's a necessary evil, that's how it's regarded, like a—well . . ." He lowered his voice. "Nothing personal, but . . . like a sporting house. Nothing personal, now, Mr. Bailiss."

The attorney-broker smiled again. "Slavery has the sanction of the law. It is a necessary part of the domestic economy, just like cotton. Why, suppose I should say, 'I love my cotton, I'll only sell it locally'? People'd think I was just crazy. Slaves have become a surplus product in the Border States and they must be disposed of where they are not produced in numbers sufficient to meet

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the local needs. You print that advertisement. Folks may not ask me to dinner, but they'll sell to me, see if they won't."

The notice did, as predicted, outrage public opinion. Old Marsta and Old Missis vowed no Negro of *theirs* would ever be sold "down the River." But somehow the broker's "jail"—as it was called—kept pretty full, though its boarders changed. Old man Bailiss had his agents out buying and his agents out selling. Sometimes he acted as agent for firms whose headquarters were in Natchez or New Orleans. He entered into silent partnerships with gentlemen of good family who wanted a quick return on capital, and who got it, but who still, it was needless to say, did not dine with him or take his hand publicly. There was talk, on and off, that the Bar Association was planning action not favorable to Bailiss for things connected with the legal side of his trade. It all came to nought.

"Mr. Bailiss," young Ned Wickerson remarked to him one day in the old man's office, "whoever said that 'a man who defends himself has a fool for a client' never had the pleasure of your acquaintance."

"Thank you, boy." The slave trader spat into a tin bucket.

"Consequently," the young man continued, "I've advised Sam Worth not to go into court if we can manage to settle out of it."

"First part of your advice is good, but there's nothing to settle."

"There's a matter of $635 to settle, Mr. Bailiss." Wickerson had been practicing for two years, but he still had freckles on his nose. He took a paper out of his wallet and put it in front of them. "There's this to settle."

The old man pushed his glasses down his nose and picked up the paper. He scanned it, lips moving silently. "Why, this is all correct," he said. "Hmm. To be sure. 'Received of Samuel Worth of Worth's Crossing, Lemuel County, the sum of $600 cash in full payment for a Negro named Dominick Swift, commonly called Domino, aged 35 years and of bright complexion, which Negro I warrant sound in mind and body and a slave for life and the title I will forever defend. James Bailiss, Rutland, Lemuel County.' Mmm. All correct. And anyway, what do you mean, six hundred and *thirty-five* dollars?"

"Medical and burial expenses. Domino died last week."

"Died, now, did he? Sho. Too bad. Well, all men are mortal."

"I'm afraid my client doesn't take much comfort from your philosophy. Says he didn't get two days' work out of Domino. Says he whipped him, first off, for laziness, but when the doctor—Doctor Sloan, that was—examined him, Doctor said he had a consumption. Died right quickly."

"Negroes *are* liable to quick consumptions. Wish they was a medicine for it. On the other hand, they seldom get malaria or yella fever. Providence."

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He cut off a slice of twist, shoved it in his cheek, then offered twist and knife to Wickerson, who shook his head.

"As I say, we'd rather settle out of court. If you'll refund the purchase price, we won't press for the other expenses. What do you say?"

Bailiss looked around the dirty, dusty office. There was a case of law books with broken bindings against the north wall. The south wall had a daguerreotype of John C. Calhoun hanging crookedly on it. The single dim window was in the east wall, and the west wall was pierced by a door whose lower panels had been scarred and splintered by two generations of shoes and boots kicking it open. "Why, I say no, o' course."

Wickerson frowned. "If you lose, you know, you'll have to pay *my* costs as well."

"I don't expect I'll lose," the old man said.

"Why, of course you'll lose," the young man insisted, although he did not sound convinced. "Dr. Sloan will testify that it was *not* 'a quick consumption.' He says it was a long-standing case of Negro tuberculosis. And you warranted the man sound."

"Beats me how them doctors think up long words like that," Bailiss said placidly. "Inter'sting point of law just come up down in N'Orleans, Ned. One of my agents was writing me. Negro brakeman had his legs crushed in a accident, man who rented him to the railroad sued, railroad pleaded 'negligence of his fellow-servant'—in this case, the engineer."

"Seems like an unassailable defense." The younger lawyer was interested despite himself. "What happened?"

"Let's see if I can recollect the Court's words." This was mere modesty. Old man Bailiss's memory was famous on all matters concerning the slave codes. "Mmm. Yes. Court said: 'The slave status has removed this man from the normal fellow-servant category. He is fettered fast by the most stern bonds our laws take note of. He cannot with impunity desert his post though danger plainly threatens, nor can he reprove free men for their bad management or neglect of duty, for the necessity of his condition is upon him.' Awarded the owner—Creole man name of Le Tour—awarded him $1300."

"It seems right, put like that . . . but now, Dr. Sloan—"

"Now, Neddy. Domino was carefully examined by *my* Doctor, old Fred Pierce—"

"Why, Pierce hasn't drawn a sober breath in twenty years! He gets only slaves for his patients."

"Well, I reckon that makes him what they call a specialist, then. No, Ned, don't go to court. You have no case. My jailer will testify, too, that Domino was sound when I sold him. It must of been that whipping sickened him."

Wickerson rose. "Will you make

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partial restitution, then?" The old man shook his head. His long hair was streaked with gray, but the face under it was still ruddy. "You *know* Domino was sick," Wickerson said. "I've spoken to old Miss Whitford's man, Micah, the blacksmith, who was doing some work in your jail a while back. He told me that he heard Domino coughing, saw him spitting blood, saw you watching him, saw you give him some rum and molasses, heard you say, 'Better not cough till I've sold you, Dom, else I'll have to sell you south where they don't coddle Negroes.' This was just before you *did* sell him—to my client."

The old man's eyes narrowed. "I'd say Micah talks over much for a black man, even one of old Miss Whitford's—a high and mighty lady that doesn't care to know me on the street. But you forget one mighty important thing, Mr. Wickerson!" His voice rose. He pointed his finger. "It makes no difference what Micah saw! It makes no difference what Micah heard! Micah is property! Just like my horse is property! And property can't testify! Do you claim to be a lawyer? Don't you know that a slave can't inherit—can't bequeath—can't marry nor give in marriage—can neither sue nor prosecute—and that it's a basic principle of the law that a slave can never testify in court except against another slave?"

Wickerson, his lips pressed tightly together, moved to the door, kicked it open, scattering a knot of idlers who stood around listening eagerly, and strode away. The old man brushed through them.

"And you'd better tell Sam Worth not to come bothering me, either!" Bailiss shouted at Wickerson's back. "I know how to take care of trash like him!" He turned furiously to the gaping and grinning loungers.

"Get away from here, you mudsills!" He was almost squeaking in his rage.

"I reckon you don't own the sidewalks," they muttered. "I reckon every white man in this state is as good as any other white man," they said; but they gave way before him. The old man stamped back into his office and slammed the door.

It was Bailiss's custom to have his supper in his own house, a two-story building just past the end of the sidewalk on Rampart Street; but tonight he felt disinclined to return there with no one but rheumaticky old Edie, his housekeeper-cook, for company. He got on his horse and rode down towards the cheerful bustle of the Phoenix Hotel. Just as he was about to go in, Sam Worth came out. Worth was a barrel-shaped man with thick, short arms and thick, bandy legs. He stood directly in front of Bailiss, breathing whiskey fumes.

"So you won't settle?" he growled. His wife, a stout woman taller than her husband, got down from their wagon and took him by the arm.

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"Come away, now, Sam," she urged.

"You'd better step aside," Bailiss said.

"I hear you been making threats against me," Worth said.

"Yes, and I'll carry them out, too, if you bother me!"

A group quickly gathered, but Mrs. Worth pulled her husband away, pushed him towards the wagon; and Bailiss went inside. The buzz of talk dropped for a moment as he entered, stopped, then resumed in a lower register. He cast around for a familiar face, undecided where to sit; but it seemed to him that all faces were turned away. Finally he recognized the bald head and bent shoulders of Dr. Pierce, who was slumped at a side table by himself, muttering into a glass. Bailiss sat down heavily across from him, with a sigh. Dr. Pierce looked up.

"A graduate of the University of Virginia," the doctor said. His eyes were dull.

"At it again?" Bailiss looked around for a waiter. Dr. Pierce finished what was in his glass.

"Says he'll horsewhip you on sight," he muttered.

"Who says?" Bailiss was surprised.

"Major Jack Moran."

Bailiss laughed. The Major was a tottery veteran of the War of 1812 who rode stiffly about on an aged white mare. "What for?" he asked.

"Talk is going around you Mentioned A Lady's Name." Pierce beckoned, and at once a waiter, whose eye old man Bailiss had not managed to catch, appeared with a full glass. Bailiss caught his sleeve as the waiter was about to go and ordered his meal. The doctor drank. "Major Jack says, impossible to Call You Out—can't appear on Field of Honor with slave trader—so instead will whip you on sight." His voice gurgled in the glass.

Bailiss smiled crookedly. "I reckon I needn't be afraid of him. He's old enough to be my daddy. A lady's name? What lady? Maybe he means a lady who lives in a big old house that's falling apart, an old lady who lives on what her Negro blacksmith makes?"

Dr. Pierce made a noise of assent. He put down his glass. Bailiss looked around the dining room, but as fast as he met anyone's eyes, the eyes glanced away. The doctor cleared his throat.

"Talk is going around you expressed a dislike for said Negro. Talk is that the lady has said she is going to manumit him to make sure you won't buy him if she dies."

Bailiss stared. "Manumit him? She can't do that unless she posts a bond of a thousand dollars to guarantee that he leaves the state within ninety days after being freed. She must know that free Negroes aren't allowed to stay on after manumission. And where would she get a thousand dollars? And what would she live on if Micah is sent away? That old lady hasn't got good sense!"

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"No," Pierce agreed, staring at the glass. "She is old and not too bright and she's got too much pride on too little money, but it's a sis—" his tongue stumbled "—a singular thing: there's hardly a person in this town, white or black or halfbreed Injun, that doesn't *love* that certain old lady. Except you. And *no*body in town loves *you*. Also a singular thing: here we are—" the doctor's teeth clicked against the glass. He set it down, swallowed. His eyes were yellow in the corners, and he looked at Bailiss steadily, save for a slight trembling of his hands and head. "Here we are, heading just as certain as can be towards splitting the Union and having war with the Yankees—all over slavery—tied to it hand and foot— willing to die for it—economy bound up in it—sure in our own hearts that nature and justice and religion are for it—and yet, singular thing: nobody likes slave traders. Nobody likes them."

"Tell me something new." Bailiss drew his arms back to make room for his dinner. He ate noisily and with good appetite.

"Another thing," the doctor hunched forward in his seat, "that hasn't added to your current popularity is this business of Domino. In this, I feel, you made a mistake. *Caveat emptor* or not, you should've sold him farther away from here, much farther away, down to the rice fields somewhere, where his death would have been just a statistic in the overseer's annual report. Folks feel you've cheated Sam Worth. He's not one of your rich absentee owners who sits in town and lets some cheese-paring Yankee drive his Negroes. He only owns four or five, he and his boy work right alongside them in the field, pace them row for row."

Bailiss grunted, sopped up gravy.

"You've been defying public opinion for years now. There might come a time when you'd want good will. My advice to you—after all, your agent only paid $100 for Domino—my advice to you is to settle with Worth for five hundred."

Bailiss wiped his mouth on his sleeve. He reached for his hat, put it on, left money on the table, and got up.

"Shoemaker, stick to your last," he said. Dr. Pierce shrugged. "Make that glass the final one. I want you at the jail tomorrow, early, so we can get the catalogue ready for the big sale next week. Hear?" The old man walked out, paying no attention to the looks or comments his passage caused.

On his horse, Bailiss hesitated. The night was rather warm, with a hint of damp in the air. He decided to ride around for a while in the hope of finding a breeze stirring. As the horse ambled along from one pool of yellow gaslight to another he ran through in his mind some phrases for inclusion in his catalogue. *Phyllis, prime woman, aged 25, can cook, sew, do fine ironing* . . . When he had first begun in the trade, three

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out of every five Negroes had been named Cuffee, Cudjoe, or Quash. He'd heard these were days of the week in some African dialect. There was talk that the African slave trade might be legalized again; that would be a fine thing. But, sho, there was always such talk, on and off.

The clang of a hammer on an anvil reminded him that he was close to Black Micah's forge. As he rounded the corner he saw Sam Worth's bandy-legged figure outlined against the light. One of the horses was unhitched from his wagon and awaited the shoe Micah was preparing for it.

A sudden determination came to Bailiss: he would settle with Worth about Domino. He hardly bothered to analyze his motives. Partly because his dinner was resting well and he felt comfortable and unexpectedly benevolent, partly because of some vague notion it would be the popular thing to do and popularity was a good thing to have before and during a big sale, he made up his mind to offer Worth $300—well, maybe he would go as high as $350, but no more: a man had to make *some*thing out of a trade.

As he rode slowly up to the forge and stopped, the blacksmith paused in his hammering and looked out. Worth turned around. In the sudden silence Bailiss heard another horse approaching.

"I've come to settle with you," the slave trader said. Worth looked up at him, his eyes bloodshot. In a low, ugly voice Worth cursed him, and reached his hand towards his rear pocket. It was obvious to Bailiss what Worth intended, so the slave trader quickly drew his own pistol and fired. His horse reared, a woman screamed—did *two* women scream? Without his meaning it, the other barrel of his pistol went off just as Worth fell.

"Fo' gawdsake, don't kill me, Mister Bailiss!" Micah cried. "Are you all right, Miss Elizabeth?" he cried. Worth's wife and Miss Whitford suddenly appeared from the darkness on the other side of the wagon. They knelt beside Worth.

Bailiss felt a numbing blow on his wrist, dropped his empty pistol, was struck again, and half fell, was half dragged, from his horse. A woman screamed again, men ran up—where had they all come from? Bailiss, pinned in the grip of someone he couldn't see, stood dazed.

"You infernal scoundrel, you shot that man in cold blood!" Old Major Jack Moran dismounted from his horse and flourished the riding crop with which he had struck Bailiss on the wrist.

"I never—he cussed me—he reached for his pistol—I only defended myself!"

Worth's wife looked up, tears streaking her heavy face.

"He had no pistol," she said. "I made him leave it home."

"You said, 'I've come to get you,' and you shot him pointblank!" The old Major's voice trumpeted.

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"He tried to shoot Miss Whitford too!" someone said. Other voices added that Captain Carter, the High Sheriff's chief deputy, was coming. Bodies pressed against Bailiss, faces glared at him, fists were waved before him.

"It wasn't like that at all!" he cried.

Deputy Carter came up on the gallop, flung the reins of his black mare to eager outthrust hands, jumped off, and walked over to Worth.

"How was it, then?" a scornful voice asked Bailiss.

"I rode up . . . I says, 'I've come to settle with you' . . . He cussed at me, low and mean, and he reached for his hip pocket . . ."

In every face he saw disbelief.

"Major Jack's an old man," Bailiss faltered. "He heard it wrong. He—"

"Heard it good enough to hang you!"

Bailiss looked desperately around. Carter rose from his knees and the crowd parted. "Sam's dead, ma'am," he said. "I'm sorry." Mrs. Worth's only reply was a low moan. The crowd growled. Captain Carter turned and faced Bailiss, whose eyes looked at him for a brief second, then turned frantically away. And then Bailiss began to speak anxiously —so anxiously that his words came out a babble. His arms were pinioned and he could not point, but he thrust his head towards the forge where the blacksmith was still standing—standing silently.

"Micah," Bailiss stuttered. "Ask Micah!"

Micah saw it, he wanted to say—wanted to shout it. *Micah was next to Worth, Micah heard what I really said, he's younger than the Major, his hearing is good, he saw Worth reach . . .*

Captain Carter placed his hand on Bailiss and spoke, but Bailiss did not hear him. The whole night had suddenly fallen silent for him, except for his own voice, saying something (it seemed long ago) to young lawyer Wickerson.

"It makes no difference what Micah saw! It makes no difference what Micah heard! Micah is property! . . . And property can't testify!"

They tied Bailiss's hands and heaved him onto his horse.

"He is fettered fast by the most stern bonds our laws take note of . . . can't inherit—can't bequeath . . . can neither sue nor prosecute—"

Bailiss turned his head as they started to ride away. He looked at Micah and their eyes met. Micah knew.

". . . it's a basic principle of the law that a slave can never testify in court except against another slave."

Someone held the reins of old man Bailiss's horse. From now on he moved only as others directed. The lights around the forge receded. Darkness surrounded him. The necessity of his condition was upon him.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MARGERY ALLINGHAM**

TITLE: ***Money To Burn***

TYPE: Detective Story

LOCALE: London

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Fat, loathsome Adelbert had kept his eye on Louise since she was the prettiest schoolgirl in Soho. What finally happened was a love affair — but without any love at all . . . Miss Allingham's newest — and one of her best.*

DID YOU EVER SEE A MAN SET light to money? Real money: using it as a spill to light a cigarette, just to show off? I have. And that's why, when you used the word "psychologist" just now, a little fish leaped in my stomach and my throat felt suddenly tight. Perhaps you think I'm too squeamish. I wonder.

I was born in this street. When I was a girl I went to school just round the corner and later on, after I'd served my apprenticeship in the big dress houses here and in France, I took over the lease of this old house and turned it into the smart little gown shop you see now. It was when I came back to go into business for myself that I saw the change in Louise.

When we went to school together she was something of a beauty, with streaming yellow hair and the cockney child's ferocious, knowing grin. All the kids used to tease her because she was better-looking than we were. The street was just the same then as it is now. Adelaide Street, Soho: shabby and untidy, and yet romantic, with every other doorway in its straggling length leading to a restaurant of some sort. You can eat in every language of the world here. Some places are as expensive as the Ritz and others are as cheap as Louise's papa's Le Coq au Vin, with its one dining room and its single palm in the whitewashed tub outside.

Louise had an infant sister and a father who could hardly speak English but who looked at one with

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proud foreign eyes from under arched brows. I was hardly aware that she had a mother until a day when that gray woman emerged from the cellar under the restaurant to put her foot down and Louise, instead of coming with me into the enchantment of the workshops, had to go down into the kitchens of Le Coq au Vin.

For a long time we used to exchange birthday cards, and then even that contact dropped; but somehow I never forgot Louise and when I came back to the street I was glad to see the name Frosné still under the sign of Le Coq au Vin. The place looked much brighter than I remembered it and appeared to be doing fair business. Certainly it no longer suffered so much by comparison with the expensive Glass Mountain which Adelbert kept opposite. There is no restaurant bearing that name in this street now, nor is there a restaurateur called Adelbert, but diners-out of a few years ago may remember him—if not for his food, at least for his conceit and the two rolls of white fat which were his eyelids.

I went in to see Louise as soon as I had a moment to spare. It was a shock, for I hardly recognized her; but she knew me at once and came out from behind the cashier's desk to give me a welcome which was pathetic. It was like seeing thin ice cracking all over her face—as if by taking her unawares I'd torn aside a barrier.

I heard all the news in the first ten minutes. Both the old people were dead. The mother had gone first but the old man had not followed her for some years after, and in the meantime Louise had carried everything including his vagaries on her shoulders. But she did not complain. Things were a bit easier now. Violetta, the little sister, had a young man who was proving his worth by working there for a pittance, learning the business.

It was a success story of a sort, but I thought Louise had paid pretty dearly for it. She was a year younger than I was, yet she looked as if life had already burned out over her, leaving her hard and polished like a bone in the sun. The gold had gone out of her hair and even her thick lashes looked bleached and tow-colored. There was something else there, too: something hunted which I did not understand at all.

I soon fell into the habit of going in to have supper with her once a week and at these little meals she used to talk. It was evident that she never opened her lips on any personal matter to anyone else; but for some reason she trusted me. Even so it took me months to find out what was the matter with her. When it came out, it was obvious.

Le Coq au Vin had a debt hanging over it. In Mama Frosné's time the family had never owed a penny, but in the year or so between her death and his own, Papa Frosné had somehow contrived not only to

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borrow the best part of four thousand pounds from Adelbert of the Glass Mountain but to lose every cent of it in half a dozen senile little schemes.

Louise was paying it back in five-hundred-pound installments. As she first told me about it, I happened to glance into her eyes and in them I saw one sort of hell. It has always seemed to me that there are people who can stand Debt in the same way that some men can stand Drink. It may undermine their constitutions but it does not make them openly shabby. Yet to the others, Debt does something unspeakable. The Devil was certainly having his money's worth out of Louise.

I did not argue with her, of course. It was not my place. I sat there registering sympathy until she surprised me by saying suddenly:

"It's not so much the work and the worry, nor even the skimping, that I really hate so much. It's the awful ceremony when I have to pay him. I dread that."

"You're too sensitive," I told her. "Once you have the money in the bank, you can put a check in an envelope, send it to him, and then forget about it, can't you?"

She glanced at me with an odd expression in her eyes; they were almost lead-colored between the bleached lashes.

"You don't know Adelbert," she said. "He's a queer bit of work. I have to pay him in cash and he likes to make a regular little performance of it. He comes here by appointment, has a drink, and likes to have Violetta as a witness by way of audience. If I don't show I'm a bit upset, he goes right on talking until I do. Calls himself a psychologist —says he knows everything I'm thinking."

"That's not what I'd call him," I said. I was disgusted. I hate that sort of thing.

Louise hesitated. "I have watched him burn most of the money just for the effect," she admitted. "There, in front of me."

I felt my eyebrows rising up into my hair. "You can't mean it!" I exclaimed. "The man's not right in the head."

She sighed and I looked at her sharply.

"Why, he's twenty years older than you are, Louise," I began. "Surely there wasn't ever anything between you? You know . . . anything like *that?*"

"No. No, there wasn't, Ellie, honestly." I believed her—she was quite frank about it and obviously as puzzled as I was. "He did speak to Papa once about me when I was a kid. Asked for me formally, you know, as they still did round here at that time. I never heard what the old man said but he never minced words, did he? All I can remember is that I was kept downstairs out of sight for a bit and after that Mama treated me as if I'd been up to something; but I hadn't even spoken to the man—he wasn't a per-

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son a young girl *would* notice, was he? That was years ago, though. I suppose Adelbert could have remembered it all that time—but it's not reasonable, is it?"

"That's the one thing it certainly isn't," I told her. "Next time *I'll* be the witness."

"Adelbert would enjoy that," Louise said grimly. "I don't know that I won't hold you to it. You ought to see him!"

We let the subject drop, but I couldn't get it out of my mind. I could see them both from behind the curtains in my shop window and it seemed that whenever I looked out, there was the tight-lipped silent woman, scraping every farthing, and there was the fat man watching her from his doorway across the street, a secret satisfaction on his sallow face.

In the end it got on my nerves and when that happens I have to talk—I can't help it.

There was no one in the street I dared to gossip with, but I did mention the tale to a customer. She was a woman named Mrs. Marten whom I'd particularly liked ever since she'd come in to inquire after the first dress I ever put in my shop window. I made most of her clothes and she had recommended me to one or two ladies in the district where she lived, which was up at Hampstead, nice and far away from Soho. I was fitting her one day when she happened to say something about men and the things they'll stoop to if their pride has been hurt, and before I'd realized what I was doing I'd come out with the story Louise had told me. I didn't mention names, of course, but I may have conveyed that it was all taking place in this street. Mrs. Marten was a nice, gentle little soul with a sweet face, and she was shocked.

"But how awful," she kept saying, "how perfectly awful! To burn the money in front of her after she's worked so hard for it. He must be quite insane. And dangerous."

"Oh, well," I said hastily, "it's his money by the time he does that, and I don't suppose he destroys much of it. Only enough to upset my friend." I was sorry I'd spoken. I hadn't expected Mrs. Marten to be quite so horrified. "It just shows you how other people live." I finished and hoped she'd drop the subject. She didn't, however. The idea seemed to fascinate her even more than it had me. I couldn't get her to leave it alone and she chattered about it all throughout the fitting. Then, just as she was putting on her hat to leave, she suddenly said, "Miss Kaye, I've just had a thought. My brother-in-law is Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard. He might be able to think of some way of stopping that dreadful man from torturing that poor little woman you told me about. Shall I mention it to him?"

"Oh, no! Please don't!" I exclaimed. "She'd never forgive me.

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There's nothing the police could do to help her. I do hope you'll forgive me for saying so, Madam, but I do hope you won't do anything of the sort."

She seemed rather hurt, but she gave me her word. I had no faith in it, naturally. Once a woman has considered talking about a thing, it's as good as done. I was quite upset for a day or two because the last thing I wanted was to get involved; but nothing happened and I'd just started to breathe easily again when I had to go down to Vaughan's, the big wholesale trimmings house at the back of Regent's Street. I was coming out with my parcels when a man came up to me. I knew he was a detective: he was the type, with a very short haircut, a brown raincoat, and that look of being in a settled job and yet not in anything particular. He asked me to come along to his office and I couldn't refuse. I realized he'd been following me until I was far enough away from Adelaide Street where no one would have noticed him approach me.

He took me to his superior who was quite a nice old boy in his way —on nobody's side but his own, as is the way with the police; but I got the impression that he was on the level, which is more than some people are. He introduced himself as Detective Inspector Cumberland, made me sit down, and sent out for a cup of tea for me. Then he asked me about Louise.

I got into a panic because when you're in business in Adelaide Street, you're in business, and the last thing you can afford to do is get into trouble with your neighbors. I denied everything, of course, insisting that I hardly knew the woman.

Cumberland wouldn't have that. I must say he knew how to handle me. He kept me going over and over my own affairs until I was thankful to speak about anything else. In the end I gave way because, after all, nobody was doing anything criminal as far as I could see. I told him all I knew, letting him draw it out bit by bit, and when I'd finished he laughed at me, peering at me with little bright eyes under brows which were as thick as silver fox fur.

"Well," he said, "there's nothing so terrible in all that, is there?"

"No," I said sulkily. He made me feel like a fool.

He sighed and leaned back in his chair.

"You run away and forget this little interview," he told me. "But just so that you don't start imagining things, let me point out something to you. The police are in business too, in a way. In their own business, that is, and when an officer in my position gets an inquiry from higher up he's got to investigate it, hasn't he? He may well think that the crime of destroying currency—'defacing the coin of the realm,' we call it—is not very seri-

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ous compared with some of the things he's got to deal with; but all the same if he's asked about it he's got to make some sort of move and send in some sort of report. Then it can all be . . . er . . . filed and forgotten, can't it?"

"Yes," I agreed, very relieved. "Yes, I suppose it can."

They showed me out and that seemed to be the end of it. I'd had my lesson though, and I never opened my lips again on the subject to anybody. It quite put me off Louise and for a time I avoided her. I made excuses and didn't go in to eat with her. However, I could still see her through the window—see her sitting at the cashier's desk; and I could still see Adelbert peering at her from his doorway.

For a month or two everything went on quietly. Then I heard that Violetta's boy had got tired of the restaurant business and had taken a job up North. He had given the girl the chance of marrying and going with him, and they'd gone almost without saying goodbye. I was sorry for Louise, being left alone that way; so I had to go and see her.

She was taking it very well—actually she was pretty lucky, for she had got a new waiter almost at once and her number one girl in the kitchen had stood by her and they managed very well. Louise was very lonely though, so I drifted back into the habit of going in there for a meal once a week. I paid, of course, but she used to come and have hers with me.

I kept her off the subject of Adelbert, but one day near the midsummer's quarter day she referred to him outright and asked me straight if I remembered my promise to be witness on the next pay day. Since Violetta was gone, she'd mentioned me to Adelbert, and he'd seemed pleased.

Well, I couldn't get out of it without hurting her feelings and since nothing seemed to turn on it I agreed. I don't pretend I wasn't curious: it was a love affair without, so far as I could see, any love at all.

The time for payment was fixed for half an hour after closing time on Midsummer's Day, and when I slipped down the street to the corner the blinds of Le Coq au Vin were closed and the door shut. The new waiter was taking a breath of air on the basement steps and he let me in through the kitchens. I went up the dark service stairs and found the two of them already sitting there, waiting for me.

The dining room was dark except for a single shaded bulb over the alcove table where they sat and I had a good look at them as I came down the room. They made an extraordinary pair.

I don't know if you've seen one of those fat little Chinese gods whom people keep on their mantel shelves to bring them luck? They are all supposed to be laughing but some only pretend and the folds of

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their china faces are stiff and merciless for all the upward lines. Adelbert reminded me of one of those. He always wore a black dinner jacket for work, but it was very thin and very loose. It came into my mind that when he took it off it must have hung like a gown. He was sitting swathed in it, looking squat and flabby against the white paneling of the wall.

Louise, on the other hand, in her black dress and tight woolen cardigan, was as spare and hard as a withered branch. Just for an instant I realized how furious she must make him. There was nothing yielding or shrinking about her. She wasn't giving any more than she was forced to—not an inch. I never saw anything so unbending in my life. She stood up to him all the time.

There was a bottle of Dubonnet on the table and they each had a small glass. When I appeared, Louise poured one for me.

The whole performance was very formal. Although they'd both lived in London all their lives, the French blood in both of them was very apparent. They each shook hands with me and Adelbert kicked the chair out for me if he only made a pretense of rising.

Louise had the big bank envelope in her black bag which she nursed as if it was a pet, and as soon as I'd taken a sip of my drink she produced the envelope and pushed it across the table to the man.

"Five hundred," she said. "The receipt is in there, already made out. Perhaps you'd sign it, please."

There was not a word out of place, you see, but you could have cut the atmosphere with a knife. She hated him and he was getting his due and nothing else.

He sat looking at her for a moment with a steady, fishy gaze; he seemed to be waiting for something —just a flicker of regret or resentment, I suppose. But he got nothing, and presently he took the envelope between his sausage fingers and thumbed it open. The five crisp green packages fell out on the white tablecloth. I looked at them with interest, as one does at money. It wasn't a fortune, of course; but to people like myself and Louise, who have to earn every cent the hard way, it was a tidy sum that represented hours of toil and scheming and self-privation.

I didn't like the way the man's fingers played over it and the sneaking spark of sympathy I'd begun to feel for him died abruptly. I knew then that if he'd had his way and married her when she was little more than a child all those years ago, he would have treated her abominably. He was a cruel beast; it took him that way.

I glanced at Louise and saw that she was unmoved. She just sat there with her hands folded, waiting for her receipt.

Adelbert began to count the money. I've always admired the way tellers in banks handle notes, but

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the way Adelbert did it opened my eyes. He went through them the way a gambler goes through a pack of cards—as if each individual note were alive and part of his hand. He loved the stuff, you could see it.

"All correct," he said at last, and put the bundles in his inside pocket. Then he signed the receipt and handed it to her. Louise took it and put it in her bag. I assumed that was the end of it and wondered what all the fuss was about. I raised my glass to Louise, who acknowledged it, and was getting up when Adelbert stopped me.

"Wait," he said. "We must have a cigarette and perhaps another little glass—if Louise can afford it."

He smiled but she didn't. She poured him another glass and sat there stolidly waiting for him to drink it. He was in no hurry. Presently he took the money out again and laid a fat hand over it as he passed his cigarette case round. I took a cigarette, Louise didn't. There was one of those metal match stands on the table and he bent forward. I moved too, expecting him to give me a light; but he laughed and drew back.

"This gives it a better flavor," he said, and, peeling off one note from the top wad, he lit it and offered me the flame. I had guessed what was coming, so I didn't show any surprise. If Louise could keep a poker face, so could I. I watched the banknote burn out, and then he took another and lit that.

Having failed to move us, he started to talk. He spoke quite normally about the restaurant business —how hard times were and what a lot of work it meant getting up at dawn to go to the market with the chef and how customers liked to keep one up late at night, talking and dawdling as if there was never going to be a tomorrow. It was all directed at Louise, rubbing it in, holding her nose down to exactly what he was doing. But she remained perfectly impassive, her eyes dark like lead, her mouth hard.

When that failed, he got more personal. He said he remembered us both when we were girls and how work and worry had changed us. I was nettled, but not too upset, for it soon became quite obvious that he did not remember me at all. With Louise it was different: he remembered her—every detail—and with something added.

"Your hair was like gold," he said, "and your eyes were blue as glass and you had a little soft wide mouth which was so gay. Where is it now, eh? Here." He patted the money, the old brute. "All here, Louise. I am a psychologist, I see these things. And what is it worth to me? Nothing. Exactly nothing."

He was turning me cold. I stared at him fascinated and saw him suddenly take up a whole package of money and fluff it out until it looked like a lettuce. Louise neither blinked nor spoke. She sat looking at him as if he was nothing, a passerby in

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the street. No one at all. I'd turned my head to glance at her and missed seeing him strike another match—so when he lit the crisp leaves it took me completely off guard.

"Look out!" I said involuntarily. "Mind what you're doing!"

He laughed like a wicked child, triumphant and delighted. "What about you, Louise? What do you say?"

She continued to look bored and they sat there facing one another squarely. Meantime, of course, the money was blazing.

The whole thing meant nothing to me; perhaps that is why it was my control which snapped.

Anyway, I knocked the cash out of his hand. With a sudden movement I sent the whole hundred notes flying out of his grasp. All over the place they went—on the floor, the table, everywhere. The room was alight with blazing banknotes.

He went after them like a lunatic —you wouldn't have thought a man that fat could have moved so fast.

It was the one that laddered my stocking which gave the game away. A spark burned the nylon and as I felt it, I looked down and snatched the charred note, holding it up to the light. We all saw the flaw in it at the same moment. The ink had run and there was a great streak through the middle, like the veining in a marble slab.

There was a long silence and the first sound came not from us but from the service door. It opened and the new waiter, looking quite different now that he'd changed his coat for one with a policeman's badge on it, came down the room followed by Inspector Cumberland.

They went up to Adelbert and the younger, heavier man put a hand on his shoulder. Cumberland ignored everything but the money. He stamped out the smouldering flames and gathered up the remains and the four untouched wads on the table. Then he smiled briefly.

"Got you, Adelbert. With it on you. We've been wondering who was passing slush in this street and when it came to our ears that someone was burning cash we thought we ought to look into it."

I was still only half comprehending and I held out the note we'd been staring at.

"There's something wrong with this one," I said stupidly.

He took it from me and grunted.

"There's something wrong with all these, my dear. Miss Frosné's money is safe in his pocket where you saw him put it. These are some of the gang's failures. Every maker of counterfeit money has them—as a rule they never leave the printing room. This one in particular is a shocker. I wonder he risked it even for burning. You didn't like wasting it, I suppose, Adelbert. What a careful soul you are."

"How did you find out?" Louise looked from them to me.

Cumberland saved me.

"A policeman, too, Madam," he said, laughing, "can be a psychologist."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **RICHARD CONNELL**

TITLE: ***Doc Em Lies***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Doctor Emma Cobb

LOCALE: Twyford, Ohio

COMMENTS: *Since Indian days it had been a superstition in Deep Valley that if lovers climbed Altar Rock in Wedding Woods and carved their initials on the Love Tree . . . The last story, never before published, by the author of that classic tale, "The Most Dangerous Game."*

HELLO! HELLO! IS THIS DOCTOR Cobb?" The voice of the man who was phoning jumped with excitement.

"Yes, this is Doctor Cobb," the woman answered.

"This is Colonel Belcher."

"Oh, good morning, Towser. Early for you, isn't it? What's up this fine May day besides you?"

"Can you come here right away?"

"Where? And why?"

"Wedding Woods. There's been a serious accident—a girl—she looks bad—"

His words were knocking against each other.

"Where in Wedding Woods?" she asked crisply.

"Near the Love Tree," Colonel Belcher told her.

"Be right there," Doctor Cobb said, and bounded out of bed.

In five minutes she was dressed in her usual costume—khaki riding breeches and gray flannel shirt. In six minutes she was racing down Deep Valley in her ten-year-old car. As she rattled by, farmers and villagers called out an affectionate greeting, "Morning, Doc Em."

She forced her panting car up the woodcutters' track in Wedding Woods, though it boiled with resentment; and when it could go no further, she swung her compact body out of the car and pushed up the valley side at a hurried trudge.

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Near the Love Tree, Colonel Orlando Belcher was waiting for her. He was an ample, florid man whose horsy tweeds suggested the country squire. Doc Em called him Towser because one of his avocations was judging at dog shows. He was pursuing another of his avocations that morning. The star shining on his vest read DEPUTY SHERIFF *(Honorary)*.

"She's lying over there," said the Colonel. "I'm afraid she's done for."

"What happened?" asked Doc Em crisply as she followed him into a grove of sycamores.

"Obviously she was climbing Altar Rock, slipped, fell, and broke her neck."

Doc Em bent over the body of the girl lying at the foot of Altar Rock, and a cry of horror and distress came from her.

"It's Eva Greenway!" she exclaimed. The dozen men who had come there from nearby farms formed a circle around them.

"Guess there's nothing you can do, eh, Doc Em?" asked a grizzled man in denim.

"Nothing, Ed," said Doc Em. "Poor little thing."

"It's a rotten shame," the farmer said. "My kids loved her."

"Best schoolteacher we ever had around here," said another farmer.

"A sad case," said Colonel Belcher. "But who is to blame? Nobody, I think, but this unfortunate girl herself."

"Never mind the sermon," said the grizzled farmer angrily. "She didn't break her own neck."

"Oh, it was an accident, obviously," said Colonel Belcher. "But a schoolteacher should have more sense than to believe in silly superstition."

"Twaddle, Towser. Schoolmarms are as human as you are." Doc Em looked him over. "More human," she said. "And more romantic, too."

"I have repeatedly warned the young people of the community of the folly of coming to this desolate and dangerous place," declared the Colonel.

"Folly, my foot," snapped Doc Em. "Boys and girls have been coming to Wedding Woods since Indian days. And so long as they believe that if they climb Altar Rock and carve their initials on the Love Tree they'll marry in a year, they'll keep coming."

"'Scuse me, Doc Em," said the grizzled farmer, "but I reckon you don't need us any more. We got chores to do."

"Run along, Ed."

"May I remind you I am in charge of the case?" said the Colonel with asperity. He turned to Ed Hormel and the others.

"You may go, men," he said. "The case is closed."

Doc Em, who had been examining the dead girl more closely, raised her head.

"They'd better stay," she said in a low voice. "The case will not be closed till we find who killed Eva Greenway."

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The men wheeled and hurried back.

"It's murder, Doc Em?" asked Ed Hormel.

She nodded gravely.

"Murder? Nonsense!" Colonel Belcher snorted. "I have examined the terrain carefully. No signs of a struggle. None of the things an expert looks for in a murder case."

"What expert?" asked Doc Em.

"I happen to have made a study of the science of criminology, Doc-to Cobb," retorted the Colonel.

"I know," said Doc Em. "By mail."

"Where's your motive?" he went on. "Not robbery. Her purse is here with thirty-nine dollars in it."

"She wore something on a gold chain around her neck," said Doc Em. "It's been taken. You can see where the link snapped off."

"She always wore a little gold dingus," Ed Hormel said. "I've seen it on her often when I took the kids to school. Sort of like a key, the kind you get if you're smart in school."

"That's right, Ed," Doc Em said. "It was a Phi Beta Kappa key. I've seen it, too. Well, it's gone."

"Not a professional job," stated the Colonel. "No regular thief would take a worthless ornament and leave the cash. I'm not convinced that this is murder. She might have caught the chain on a bush, you know. My official opinion is still that she died as a result of an accident—a fall from Altar Rock."

"Why do you want to make it out an accident, Towser?" inquired Doc Em. Then she smiled. "I guess I know. Because *I* say it's murder. Now stop being contrary—and find out who did it. This was no accident. The man who did it tried to make it look like one; but a fall of fifteen feet on soft ground is hardly ever fatal. Besides, falls don't leave faint fingermarks on a person's throat," Doc Em added drily. "So stop wasting time and catch the brute who did this."

"But where's your motive?" persisted the Colonel.

"Listen, Colonel," said Ed Hormel. "We're going to get the skunk who did this—and when we do—"

The others nodded ominously.

"Easy now, boys," said Doc Em. "Keep your heads. This was done late last night. He has a big start."

By this time the news had grapevined up and down Deep Valley, and others had joined the knot of angry men around the Love Tree—Bob Leslie, the banker; Frank Eller, the school principal; young Jeff Rand, the lawyer; and a score more of shocked citizens.

"Gentlemen," said Colonel Belcher solemnly, "we have decided that this is murder. It obviously falls under the head of crimes of passion. This was done by somebody who hated Eva Greenway, some enemy—"

"Folks aren't usually killed by loving friends," observed Doc Em. "Less talk, Towser, and more action."

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"We can't start until we have some clues," the Colonel protested. "First, one looks for a motive. We must make a list of her enemies—"

"If you can find one I'll eat him raw, and you, too, Towser," said Doc Em. "Everybody liked poor Eva. Isn't that so, Professor Eller?"

"It is," said the school principal. "She did her work as a teacher very well. I know little about her private life, for she was unusually quiet and retiring. She often went on long walks, but always alone. Frankly, she was a rather mysterious person. Last week she told me she was leaving here at the end of the term; but she would not tell me why."

"Any men in her life?" inquired the Colonel.

"Never heard of any," said Professor Eller, "and I think I would have. Teachers gossip, you know. The fact is, in the five years I've been here I never knew Miss Greenway to have a date with a man. My wife and I had her to dinner occasionally, and we'd ask various men, but Eva Greenway showed no romantic interest in any of them. She was a pretty, attractive girl, too. Mrs. Eller and I thought it strange."

"Eva puzzled me, too," said Doc Em. "She was always friendly and polite, but I had a feeling she was holding back something. Something she was afraid of."

"Then the man angle is out," said the Colonel.

"Is it?" said Doc Em. "Look at this."

They crowded around the trunk of the giant sycamore called the Love Tree. It was covered with the hearts and initials of generations of lovers. Doc Em was pointing to a heart, crudely carved, a few feet up the trunk. It contained the initials *EG&I*.

"Fresh marks," said Ed Hormel. "Made no later than yesterday!"

Colonel Belcher scrutinized the initials through his magnifying glass.

"Obviously *EG* stands for Eva Greenway," he said. "But who is *I*? We must find a man whose first initial is *I*."

"Say, listen," exclaimed Ed Hormel. "Last year Sam Webb had a big Russky working for him—a good-looking guy, a demon with the dames. We all called him John. His Russian name was Ivan!"

"He's our man," cried the Colonel. "Where is he now?"

"Out West somewhere," said Ed Hormel. "He left to be a rassler."

"The picture is clear now," said the Colonel. "This Ivan and Miss Greenway were having a secret romance. He came back, they quarreled, and he strangled her. We'll get him. I'll call out the Hussars."

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The village of Twyford boasted a troop of Hussars, which Colonel Belcher had organized, outfitted from his own pocket, and commanded.

"Stop playing cops and robbers a minute, and use your head," Doc Em said. "In the first place, would an intelligent, refined girl like Eva be mixed up with a dumb, dirty lout like Ivan?"

"Women do queer things," said the Colonel.

"In the second place," went on Doc Em, "has anybody seen Ivan around here recently?"

Nobody had.

"I cover the valley like a carpet," Doc Em said, "and if he had come back, I'd have heard of it. You can check on him, if you like, Towser, but don't waste your time beating the bushes for him. If he did sneak back here and do this dreadful thing, you can bet he didn't stick around."

The Colonel turned to a Captain of Hussars, who in his civilian moments peddled vegetables.

"Captain Priddy," he said, "take your truck over to my kennels and bring back Satan and Simon Legree. If Ivan's in the valley, they'll track him down."

"He won't be in the valley," said Doc Em, "and bloodhounds can't follow a scent if they haven't something to start with. You boys better scatter around and see if you can find any trace of the killer."

The Colonel scowled when he saw how they rushed to obey Doc Em.

A shout came from Ed Hormel. He was on his hands and knees, examining the soft ground under a bush not a dozen feet from the body. They all saw, clearly outlined, the imprint of a naked human foot. Doc Em bent over it.

"Made by a man," she said. "About size eleven. A big man. What size shoe do you wear, Colonel Belcher?"

"Twelve," he said, haughtily, "and I am not in the habit of going round barefoot."

"Somebody is," said Doc Em, and the frown on her face deepened.

"He's shy his middle toe," said Ed Hormel. He looked troubled, too. "Guess Doc Em knows who made this print."

"I'm afraid I do," said Doc Em somberly.

"So do I," said the Colonel. "Squirrel Moody! He never wears shoes from spring to fall—and he lost a toe in a trap two years ago."

"That's right," said Doc Em. "The boys set a trap for him because he was setting rabbits free from *their* traps. . . . But helping is more in Squirrel's line than hurting."

"Ira Moody!" cried the Colonel. "That's our *I!*"

"Keep your shirts on," said Doc Em. "I just can't believe Squirrel would do a thing like this. He's a gentle creature. Maybe he hasn't all his marbles, and lives in the woods like a wild thing, and his only friends are animals, homeless creatures like himself, but I've known Squirrel since he was a sick baby

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somebody abandoned in a ditch, and I never knew him to do anything vicious or really wrong."

"If you don't count stealing," put in the Colonel.

"Yes," said Doc Em quietly. "Squirrel does take things. But what and why? Well, he's helped himself to corn and apples from Ed Hormel's place."

"Mine, too," said another farmer.

"And mine," said a third.

"Not to sell, mind you," said Doc Em. "But only because he was hungry. Or to feed the other wild creatures, the squirrels, rabbits, birds."

"He stole my deputy sheriff's badge," said Colonel Belcher.

"And brought it back after he'd played with it a few days," said Doc Em. "He picks up things the way a magpie does, not because they're valuable but because they're bright—"

She stopped suddenly.

"Like a golden key?" said Colonel Belcher triumphantly.

"I tell you Squirrel is no murderer," said Doc Em, but her tone lacked conviction. "He has the mind of a child—"

"And the body and appetites of a man," said the Colonel.

"I know something!"

They turned toward the downy-cheeked farmhand who had spoken.

"What do you know, Private Goslin?" asked the Colonel in his Commander of Hussars voice.

"Squirrel was here last night all right, sir. I seen him."

"Man alive, why didn't you say so?" roared the Colonel.

Private Goslin went chili-sauce red.

"I was out with a certain party," he said, "and if her old man found out—"

"You needn't tell her name, Goose," Doc Em said. "Tell us what you saw."

"I saw Squirrel hightailin' out of Wedding Woods like a spook was after him," said Goslin. "Right near here too. Didn't think much of it then. He's always dodging around in the woods."

"Could you and the girl swear to this at the trial?" Colonel Belcher asked.

"Bible oath," said Goslin.

"There ain't going to be a trial," said Ed Hormel.

"You're a lot of numskulls," said Doc Em. "Was Eva the sort to get romantic about Squirrel and carve his initials on a tree trunk?"

"She was always very kind to him, I know that," said Jeff Rand.

"Bought him a pair of shoes in my store last fall," said Jake Lubin.

"Eva was kind to everybody," said Doc Em.

"I have it!" cried the Colonel. "Squirrel carved those initials himself. Lured her here, somehow, tried to make love to her, and when she resisted—"

"There's something you should know," interrupted Professor Eller. "I don't want to damn the poor chap any more than the evidence already

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damns him, but I know that Miss Greenway was afraid of Squirrel."

"Rubbish!" snapped Doc Em.

"Excuse me, Doctor Cobb," the school principal said frostily, "but I think I have a reputation for being meticulously accurate in any statements I make. The fact is, Miss Greenway came to me two weeks ago and said Squirrel had been following her. He'd wait around the school and follow her home. When she was out walking, she'd see him skulking behind her in the bushes. True, I always considered him harmless, but it would seem that I was mistaken."

"What are we waiting for?" growled Ed Hormel.

"He's somewhere in the valley," said another farmer. "I'll bet on that."

"Captain Priddy, get the dogs," the Colonel ordered.

The Hussar saluted and swung into his vegetable truck.

"I'm not going with you," Doc Em said. "I have work to do. You have yours. But don't do anything you'll be ashamed of."

They avoided her eyes.

Doc Em turned and headed home.

It was near evening when Doc Em returned to her little house on the corner of the Village common, weary after her round of sick calls. She was putting away her black bag when she heard a noise in her cellar, a low sobbing. She went to the cellar door.

"Who's down there?" she called.

The answer came in a frightened whimper.

"It's me, Squirrel."

"Come up, Squirrel," she said. "I'm alone."

He shambled up from the cellar. His old dungarees were torn by brambles, his face under the tan and grime was white, and his eyes were wide with terror.

"Don't let them get me," he pleaded. "They sicked the dogs on me. The dogs wouldn't hurt me, but the men—they were terrible mad—and they had guns—they shot at me—"

He fell on his knees before her.

"Oh, Doc Em, don't let them hurt me," he sobbed.

"I'll help you, Squirrel, if I can. Why did you do it?"

Through his sobs he said, "I couldn't help it. I got a spell when I saw her there in the woods, so little and so pretty. I hugged her—just once. She didn't say nothing, just went all limp. Oh, Doc Em, I didn't mean to hurt her."

"She was always good to you, Squirrel," said Doc Em, sternly.

"Yes. Yes. And she was going away. I wanted something so I'd remember her. I don't remember good. So I took this."

He fumbled in his hip pocket, pulled out a Phi Beta Kappa key, and held it out to Doc Em.

Outside they heard the tramp of feet, the sound of voices, and the low bay of the hounds.

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"I can't run any more," whimpered Squirrel.

"Go down in the cellar," said Doc Em.

She rolled a cigarette and went out to her porch. The hounds strained at the leash Colonel Belcher held. With him were nearly a hundred men, sweaty and dusty from the manhunt. Many of them had shotguns and rifles. Among them were the Twyford Hussars, in their garish purple uniforms.

"Surround the house, men," ordered Colonel Belcher.

"Boys," said Doc Em, as if she was addressing a crowd of unruly urchins. "You're messing up my front lawn. Go home and behave yourselves."

"We want Squirrel," said Ed Hormel.

"Send him out or we'll come in and get him," said Colonel Belcher.

Doc Em puffed on her cigarette. She was perfectly composed.

"Well, there are a lot of you brave men—and only one of me," she said. "But I'd go slow if I were you. You're all upset and mad. I don't blame you. I am, too. But we've got law here. Let the law take its course."

"Kindly get out of the way," said Colonel Belcher. "He's guilty, and we're going to give him what he deserves."

Doc Em did not budge from the doorway.

"For a long time now," she said, "I've taken care of you and your kids. You have faith in me, and that's why you take my pills and get well. I'm giving you a prescription now—and I want you to take it. Go home and let me turn Squirrel over to the Sheriff at the county seat."

"Doc Em," said Ed Hormel, "we all respect you. But we got wives and daughters to think of."

"Think of them, then," Doc Em retorted. "Think how they'll feel, and how you'll feel, if you hurt an innocent man."

"He's not innocent," thundered the Colonel. "I ask you for the last time—get out of the way."

Still Doc Em did not move.

"Did I ever lie to any of you?" she asked.

"Oh, we trust *you*, all right, Doc Em," said Ed Hormel.

"Then listen," she said. "As I stand here, your doctor, proud of your belief in me, I give you my solemn word of honor Squirrel is not guilty."

Her words quieted the mob.

"Where's your evidence?" the Colonel demanded.

"It will come out at the trial," Doc Em said. "All I'm going to tell you now is that I know positively that Squirrel did not kill Eva Greenway."

"Guess that's good enough for me," said Ed Hormel. "What do you say, boys?"

There were hurried conferences in the mob.

"Doc Em wouldn't lie."

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"Guess if she says he didn't do it, he didn't."

"I don't like this job, anyway."

"Leave it to Doc Em. She always shoots square."

They began to disperse. The Colonel, alone, was not convinced.

"It's a trick," he declared. "She'd do anything to save the scoundrel."

"Saving lives is my job," said Doc Em. "So, Towser, take yourself and your long-eared pals back to the kennel. Jeff Rand can stay here and see that I deliver Squirrel to the Sheriff."

Jeff Rand followed Doc Em into her consulting room.

"Jeff," she said, "will you take this case and defend Squirrel? I'll foot the bill."

"What bill?" Jeff said. "Who helped me through law school?"

"Forget that. Want the case?"

"Sure. But if he's innocent, it won't come to trial."

Doc Em sighed.

"I told a lie out there," she said. "Squirrel is as guilty as sin."

"But you gave your word!" Jeff was shocked.

"I did," said Doc Em unhappily. "Well, it won't be worth much from now on. I know these Valley people. They won't forget I lied to 'em. But what could I do? They were going to do a vile thing. For their own sakes I had to save them from that. I love them, Jeff. They're my family. Their confidence in me is the most precious thing I have. And now I've killed it."

"Maybe I can find a way out for Squirrel," said Jeff. "An insanity plea—"

"No," said Doc Em. "He's legally sane. I'd have to testify to that. He knows right from wrong."

"I'll look for a loophole."

"No. No technicalities, Jeff. I'll buck a mob, but not the law."

"Guess I better plead him guilty and get it over with."

"I suppose so," said Doc Em dully. "He'll get the Chair and I'll get the gate. A doctor folks don't trust might just as well take up fortune telling."

She showed the Phi Beta Kappa key to Jeff.

"Squirrel had this on him," she said.

Jeff frowned.

"That clinches it," he said. "Once the jury sees that—"

"They'll see it. I'm not going to suppress any evidence."

She toyed idly with the key.

"I wasn't smart enough to win one of these things," she said.

"Neither was I," said Jeff. "But poor Eva was, though I must say I thought she was a lot sweeter than she was bright."

"There's a Latin inscription on the key," said Doc Em. "How's your Latin, Jeff?"

"Gone with the wind," he said. "I know *habeas corpus* and that's about all."

"I only know pill Latin," said Doc Em. "Wonder what this means—"

AMICA CARA SEMPER TE AMABO

"Unless I'm wrong, and I may be,

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amabo means love," said Doc Em. "What's scholarship got to do with love? Oh, well, it's no use stalling. My goose is cooked a crisp brown. I'm a bit old to start some place else, but when you're licked . . ."

Suddenly she smacked the desk with a small brown fist.

"By golly, I won't be licked," she cried. "I gave my word, and I'm going to make good on it!"

"You can't possibly prove Squirrel innocent," said Jeff.

"Maybe not," said Doc Em. "But with his life and my reputation at stake, I'm not going to give up while there's an ounce of fight or prayer left in me."

They heard a car buck to a stop at her gate.

"The Sheriff," she said, and went to the cellar door.

"Come up, Squirrel," she called.

In the hot courtroom the jury fanned itself and listened to Squirrel Moody on the stand. Yes, he was in Wedding Woods that night. Yes, he saw Eva Greenway. She was sleeping. Near the Love Tree. He had one of his spells. He kissed her, embraced her, took the ornament from her neck. He didn't mean to hurt her. He couldn't remember everything that happened—he didn't "remember good." The District Attorney finished with him. Squirrel went back to his seat, put his head on his hands, and began to cry.

Confidently the District Attorney spoke.

"The State has proved the guilt of the prisoner beyond any doubt. You heard his story. With every word he spoke he hanged himself. Witnesses have placed him at the scene of the crime. His footprint was found there. Professor Eller has testified that the prisoner used to follow Miss Greenway, and that she feared him. Further proof is hardly needed, but I am going to call one last witness for the prosecution. Will you take the stand, Doctor Cobb?"

Doc Em took the stand. The eyes of the crowded courtroom were on her. Once they had been friendly eyes. Now they were hurt and hostile.

"You brought to my office a certain object," the District Attorney began, "which the prisoner turned over to you. Is this it?"

He handed her the Phi Beta Kappa key. She nodded.

"Do you recognize it as belonging to Eva Greenway, Doctor?"

"I've seen her wearing it," replied Doc Em.

"That's all, thanks. Unless Mr. Rand wishes to cross-examine you."

The District Attorney's tone suggested this was highly unlikely.

Jeff Rand rose and faced Doc Em.

"Doctor," he said, "when you were asked if that key belonged to Miss Greenway, you did not answer 'yes'. You said, 'I have seen her wearing it.' Why did you answer in that way?"

"To be accurate," said Doc Em,

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"I know she wore it. But I don't know it was hers."

"After the prisoner gave you the key, you kept it a week or so before turning it over to the District Attorney, did you not?"

"I did."

"Why?"

"To study it."

"Is there anything distinctive about it, Doctor Cobb?"

"There is. I compared it with many other Phi Beta Kappa keys. They all bore the name of the person to whom they had been given. This key has no name. In its place is a Latin inscription, which was on none of the other keys I've ever seen."

"Read it to the court, please."

"Amica cara semper te amabo," Doc Em read.

"What does it mean?"

Doc Em shrugged.

"I'm a doctor, not a Latin scholar," she said. "There happens to be a Latin scholar, though, in court. I suggest you ask Professor Eller to translate this for you."

"Good idea," said Jeff. "Will you step up here for a moment, Professor?"

Professor Eller took the stand. He had been handsome once; now, in his mid-forties, he was portly and bald, and his face had a set, academic, almost prim look.

"I take it you qualify as an expert in Latin," Jeff said.

Professor Eller permitted himself a half smile.

"I majored in Latin in college," he answered, "and taught it for thirteen years."

Jeff handed him the key.

"Translate this inscription, if you please."

In clear tones the professor translated: "'Darling sweetheart, I'll always love you.'"

"Thank you, Professor," said Jeff. "No, don't go. Let me ask you if you happen to be a member of Phi Beta Kappa."

"I have that honor."

"May I see your key, please?"

"I haven't it with me."

"Will you send for it?"

"No use, I'm afraid," the professor said. "I mislaid it some years ago and never found or replaced it."

"Look at the key in your hand," Jeff said. "Is that *your* key?"

Professor Eller glanced at the key.

"Impossible," he said. "I lost mine before I came to Ohio from California."

"Are you certain it is not yours?"

"Absolutely."

"Then whose is it?"

"Miss Greenway wore it. I assume it was hers."

"Was she a Latin scholar?"

"No. She never studied Latin. She was a grade teacher—taught only elementary subjects."

"Did you ever wonder how Miss Greenway, not a scholar, had won this key which is a symbol of high scholastic standing?" Jeff asked.

"I never indulge in idle speculation," the Professor said.

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"I have here a list of all the members of Phi Beta Kappa since the society was organized. Her name is not on it. So the key is not hers. It is not at all likely then that she had this inscription put on the key," said Jeff. "It is a declaration of devotion —such as an ardent lover might make. Now let me ask you, Professor Eller, what sort of man would express his passion in Latin?"

"I am not an expert on methods of expressing passion," the Professor replied. "I have translated the inscription. I should like to return to my work now."

"But don't you agree that a man who would make love in Latin is almost certainly a schoolteacher?" persisted Jeff.

"You are entitled to your theory, Mr. Rand," said the Professor. "I am not here to air theories."

"Very well," said Jeff cheerfully. "Here's a question you *can* answer. Professor Eller, is it not a fact that this is really *your* key, that *you* had those words engraved on it?"

Professor Eller grew purple-red.

"It is not a fact," he said, angrily. "It is a damnable lie!"

"Would you subscribe to the theory that a person who lies about one important matter will lie about everything?" asked Jeff, and he shot a side glance toward Doc Em.

"I repeat I am not here to air theories! I should also like to remind you that I am not on trial."

Jeff swung round and pointed to a man in the rear of the room.

"Will you stand up, sir, and identify yourself?"

A thin-faced man with a city air got up.

"My name is Louis Immerman, partner in A. Immerman and Sons, jewelers, Chicago," he said.

"Will you come up here and look at the key the witness is holding."

Mr. Immerman came forward and took the key.

"Have you ever seen this key before?" Jeff went on.

"Yes, I engraved this inscription on it. Two years ago. I removed a name and put these words in its place."

"What was the name you removed?"

"Frank Eller."

"Who had it done?"

"That gentleman sitting there."

"A lie!" cried Professor Eller huskily.

Jeff Rand stood over the school principal and fired words at him.

"Is it a lie that you have, for the past two years, been meeting Eva Greenway secretly in Wedding Woods and elsewhere? Is it a lie that you live on a scale far beyond what you can afford from your salary as a teacher, because your wife has a large inherited income? Is it a lie that you promised to divorce your wife and marry Eva Greenway, but changed your mind because you didn't want to lose your wife's money, and had grown tired of Eva, anyway? Is it a lie that you consented to a last meeting in Wedding Woods

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and found Eva making a pathetic effort to keep the romance alive by carving her initials and yours on the Love Tree?"

"Lies, all lies!" screamed Eller.

"Is it not true that Eva had time only to cut the downstroke of the letter F—your first initial—when you arrived? Then didn't she insist that you keep your word and marry her, or she would expose you to the world and your wife? And then, to silence her, you killed her? And then, didn't you try to put the blame on a poor half-wit who happened along just after you left Eva lying there—her body still warm but with her neck broken? Look me in the eye, if you can, Frank Eller, murderer, and tell me again that I lie!"

Eller was not purple-red now, he was greenish white. All the blood seemed to have drained from his big body . . .

Afterward, when everybody got through slapping Squirrel Moody on the back and warmly congratulating Doc Em, she took the poor fellow by the hand like a child and led him out to her car.

"It's a funny world, Squirrel," Doc Em said. "Up to a point the lies are believed and the small still voice mumbling the truth goes unheard. But in the end it's the truth that prevails." She pushed the dazed half-wit gently into her rattletrap. "You come on home with me, Squirrel. There's a deep-dish apple pie I've been saving for you."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ELIZABETH GANE**

TITLE: ***Arlie and the Vampires***

TYPE: Juvenile Delinquency

CRIMINALS: The Vampire Gang

LOCALE: A city in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Twelve-year-old Arlie had no father and he lived in a tough neighborhood. If he ever got caught by the Vampires in Mulligan's Alley . . . A fine, moving story told with deep understanding of a terrifying problem.*

"ARLIE," SAID MISS BASCOM, "NAME the countries in South America."

Arlie started in surprise. Dismay filled his blue eyes. He had not heard the question. He stood up. "Yes'm?" he said. Nobody in the class said "Yes'm" but Arlie.

His name was James Arlington Thomas. After the father who had disappeared shortly before his birth. Everyone called him Arlie. He was twelve years old, large for his age, with red hair, plump chipmunk cheeks, and big stubby hands and feet.

"The countries in South America," Miss Bascom repeated.

He shuffled his feet and stared at the frost-decked window that had occupied his attention prior to the question. The entire seventh grade was apparently waiting for his recitation. He tried. He liked Miss Bascom. She liked him. Not that she showed it much. Just nice sometimes. She got tired, too—trying to manage them all. Pete Scannon, Cinco Capito, and the rest.

Arlie heard the sound of his own voice from far away. He didn't do too badly. Named them all but Paraguay and Uruguay. He sat down. Inside he felt very tight. As if something coiled up in his stomach was going to come up in his throat and choke him. He clenched and unclenched his fists. He kept thinking

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of Mr. Levison. Lying there on the floor of his tailor shop with that funny gash in his neck. It was very queer. Mr. Levison used to give him candy. Now there would be no more candy. But that wasn't what made Arlie feel so bad. Mr. Levison was gone. Somebody had killed him. Mr. Levison—a kind, good man.

Where was God? thought Arlie. *Where was God when the Devil came in and slit Mr. Levison's throat?* The door to the shop had been open when Arlie was delivering his morning papers. He heard talking. He went in. Officer Sinclair looked like a ghost himself. "Hello, Arlie," he said. And then Arlie had seen Mr. Levison.

"I wonder when—" began Officer Sinclair, and his voice sounded like a file scraping against concrete.

"He dead long time," said Robert Roosevelt Burns. "He dead since right after he close up last night. He stiff and cold."

"Don't touch the body."

"Yessir." Robert Roosevelt had come in to light the fires and had found Mr. Levison. "He good man. Who want kill man like that?" His usually black face reminded Arlie of gray dough. Two huge tears hung from his eyes.

Arlie kept looking at Mr. Levison. It made him sick to his stomach. Violence did that. Hateful, evil, vicious people nauseated him. His blood always turned to water, and his head felt as if it were floating in the air. There was a musty smell. And a sour smell. Ever afterward that smell was to remind him of death.

Arlie didn't cry. He turned and went away, gulping in the fresh air. He finished delivering his papers, then went home to breakfast.

His mother was dressed, ready for work in Weinstein's Bargain Basement. "Arlie," she said. "You ain't eating your cereal. You stuff that in your craw."

"Yes'm," he said. But his mind wasn't on his eating.

"Arlie—" her voice took on a worried edge, "you ain't been into nothing—nothing you shouldn't of?"

"No'm." He could not tell her about Mr. Levison. It would make her unhappy. She liked Mr. Levison. Everybody did. All he said was, "Ma, Mr. Levison didn't—doesn't have the same God as us, does he?"

"That's a peculiar notion for a young 'un. Sure he does. He's a Jew, of course, so he's got some ways that is different. But he's a good man. If you're getting any queer ideas you better go see Father Minelli."

She always sent him to Father Minelli. *You got to be a good boy, Arlie. Grow up educated. So's you don't slave in no dump like me. And you don't get mixed in nothing wrong or bad.* She'd always been set on that.

"You sure you done nothing? You look peaked-like."

He guessed she meant sex. She'd talked to him. All she knew. And so had Father Minelli talked to him.

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He knew about everything by now, he supposed. Except about how that terrible thing could happen to Mr. Levison.

"Holy Mother of God," he whispered, crossing himself when his mother turned away. He always did the best he could. Delivered papers in the morning. Carried groceries in the afternoons for Mr. Knazak. Bought his own clothes—even the heavy shoes his feet grew out of every three months. And for Christmas he bought his mother a pink wrapper with feathers, out of the tips he'd saved all year. Now the thought tormented him: *Was it enough just to be good?*

He could not concentrate in school. On account of the tight feeling in his stomach and the doubts and confusion in his brain. He focused his eyes on Donna Adams, one row to the left and two seats ahead. She had soft brown curly hair, like wood shavings, and brown eyes. Today she wore a pink dress. And she always smelled so good. As if maybe her folks put her in the tub every night and slathered fine soap all over her until the smell soaked in and never went away. She was smart, too. He wanted to ask her to Rosemarie Tupperman's party. But he was scared. Donna Adams never paid any attention to him.

I guess, he thought, *you're scared right now. You're always scared.* And he wondered what he'd have done if he'd been Mr. Levison and they'd come after *him*. To kill *him*.

After school he put on his storm jacket and ear muffs and hurried out into the bleakness. He had only ten minutes to report to Mr. Knazak. Mr. Knazak was a Pole. He told Arlie he'd come from a bad country. But Mr. Knazak laughed a lot. It couldn't have been so bad—not when he laughed like that.

The cold made Arlie's fingers stiff. He thrust his hands into his pockets and lowered his head against the sharp bite of the wind. He went through Mulligan's Alley to save two minutes. For diversion he kicked rusty tin cans and hummed to himself. A queer tuneless sound.

"Aiy-ya! Aiy-ya!" The noise rasped in his head. And he heard the sound of running behind him. He turned quickly and stopped.

Then he knew he should have run. For there were Pete Scannon and Cinco Capito and three others he'd never seen before.

Arlie backed up against a fence, stumbling over a garbage pail in his haste. They stood in a semicircle before him, the five of them. Pete was bigger than the rest, but scrawny-like. Cinco was small, with dark smooth skin and sharp pointed eyeteeth, like a rat. All five wore dirty white sweat shirts with a big V on the front. For Vampire, Arlie knew—that was the name of their gang.

"Aiy-ya!" said Cinco. "He looks scared, don't he?" And he began to prance around, turning on his toes, waving his arms and bowing. "Yes'm, Miss Bascom—No'm, Miss

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Bascom. Ain't he the polite one?"

The others laughed. Arlie made himself as small as possible against the fence. It was too late to run now. They'd catch him. And he'd heard stories about the Vampire Gang.

Pete Scannon rolled his eyes soulfully. "Arlie here's such a *goo-ood* boy. He never does nothing wrong. Just like his ma says. Always lighting candles for Father Minelli. Ole Saint Pete is leaning out of the pearly gates just hankerin' for a sight of *goo-ood ole Arlie!*"

Arlie managed a sickly grin. His tongue felt too big for his mouth. "Look, fellows. A joke's a joke. But I'm late for Mr. Knazak's."

One of the other hoodlums clutched his belly. "Ha! Mudder's little helper! That's what he is. Me insides is all tore up!"

Arlie's palms were soggy. There was a sickness in the pit of his stomach. He tried to move on, but they tightened the semicircle in front of him.

Cinco muttered an obscenity Arlie had never heard. "Tell you what, Arlie. We're gonna cut off your ears. Then we're gonna dig out your guts, slice 'em into pieces, and throw 'em in the river. And that ain't all. We're gonna beat your silly brains in."

"Aiy-ya!" they chorused, and closed in.

Arlie's muscles turned to dough. "Look, guys—!" he bleated.

And then the miracle happened. "Something going on here?"

Behind them loomed the big body of Officer Sinclair. He stood twirling his stick. It made a great swooshing sound. Arlie caught his breath. "Hello!" he said. And tears stuck in his eyes.

Officer Sinclair shoved the hoodlums aside, walked over and put his arm on the boy's shoulder. "Son, you're due at Knazak's. I'm going that way. We'll walk together."

Arlie gasped for air and managed to smile. Vampires sucked your blood clean out of your veins. He could never go through Mulligan's Alley again.

By six o'clock he had delivered his quota of meat and vegetables for Mr. Knazak.

"You take a pound of coffee with the order for Mrs. Abromowitz, Arlie?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good boy. See you tomorrow."

Arlie went home, carefully watching the shadows along the three intervening blocks.

He hung up his coat and helped set the table in the two-room cold water flat. The place was clean. His mother scrubbed the floors on her knees every Saturday night. And she had made bright blue print curtains from mill ends.

She didn't look right at him until they were sitting down at the table. She helped him to the stew then, and her eyes bored into him. "You're quiet, Arlie. I heard something today. About Mr. Levison."

He nodded, afraid to speak.

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She gave him the look that could see into his brain, that told her everything. "This morning you knew. You saw him?"

"Yes'm."

"He was a good man."

Something in him wanted to scream in protest. *So what?*

"Some day," he said suddenly, "we're gonna get out of here. You're not gonna work in Weinstein's Basement. You're gonna have satins and laces and a television set and ride in a Cadillac."

She smiled. She was tired but when she smiled like that she was still pretty. "That's what Jimmy Sterns used to say, remember? Now he's doing a stretch up the river. And his ma so proud at first, thinking him a real Wall Street broker. You shed them silly notions. You make a good cop like Officer Sinclair and I'll be satisfied."

He gulped down his water. He'd never make a cop, for sure.

"Arlie, you sick? Your face is like whitewash."

"No'm. I was just wondering."

"What?"

"How such an awful thing could happen to Mr. Levison. If God takes care of people, like Father Minelli says, then why was he killed? He wasn't doin' nothing bad." He couldn't tell her how *he* had nearly been taken care of that afternoon. Just luck, most likely, that Officer Sinclair showed up.

"Maybe Mr. Levison didn't try, Arlie. You got to cooperate with God. Maybe he was just scared, and there was nobody to help him."

I know. He felt like me—all water inside. "I see," he said. But he didn't really see. He went to bed thinking *In all the world there's nobody, nothing you can count on.*

The next day it all happened very suddenly. Pete and Cinco were raising a ruckus in class. Arlie didn't notice just what. Then all at once Miss Bascom reached out and grabbed Pete by the arm and jerked him out of his seat. A little woman like Miss Bascom. Pete was half a head taller. "You!" she said. "I've had enough! Now stand up there, out of the way. And you, Cinco!"

Stop, Arlie wanted to shout, *you don't understand about them!*

And then Cinco, his lips curled, was standing over Miss Bascom with a shiny knife in his hand, and Pete was behind her holding back her arms. She had turned pale with fear.

Nobody moved. The children shrank back in their seats. Arlie thought of Mr. Levison, lying on his floor in his own blood.

He got up slowly and crawled onto Donna Adams's desk. Nobody had helped Mr. Levison, he kept thinking. *And if nobody helps Miss Bascom they'll kill her, because to them murder is nothing.* There were human beings like that, he understood suddenly, human beings with no good feelings.

Arlie bent forward, then sprang.

He landed on Cinco's back, knocking him to the floor. The knife slid

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into a corner. With his knees he gripped Cinco's body and felt the fury rise in him as he pounded the other boy on the head. Then Pete let go of Miss Bascom and jumped him. But Arlie quickly rolled over and kicked Pete in the stomach. Then he was on his feet, lashing out with his fists, smashing them into Pete's ugly face. The hoodlum reeled. Arlie leaped, his stubby fingers clutching at Pete's throat. Pete fell down, Arlie on top of him. Arlie leaned over. "I'm going to dig out your guts," he said distinctly, "slice 'em into pieces and throw 'em in the river. Then I'm gonna beat your brains in." There was a crooked grin on his face, and Pete Scannon's eyes paid Arlie a tribute he had never received before.

He looked up. Cinco was huddled against the wall, nursing a battered nose. He felt a hand on his shoulder. "Son, it's all right. Get up." Officer Sinclair held out his hand. Arlie got up. Someone in the class had recovered sufficiently from terror to go for the police.

Sinclair took hold of Pete and Cinco. Miss Bascom held onto the knife. She was smiling, but her lips kept trembling a little. Arlie glared at the two Vampires in front of him.

"I guess Miss Bascom is grateful to you, son."

Arlie was suddenly looking at Donna Adams. Eyes bright, she was staring at him as if she'd never seen him before.

"Arlie, you're a hero," said Miss Bascom. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, Ma'am." At least she hadn't fared the same as Mr. Levison. Arlie felt as if he had sort of avenged Mr. Levison.

Officer Sinclair looked tired and worried. "Sometimes I don't know what we're going to do," he said. But he didn't relax his grip on the two hoodlums.

I know, thought Arlie. *I know what to do.* He stole another glance at the battered Vampires. "'Scuse me," he said suddenly. And he dashed out of the room down to the boys' lavatory. His stomach turned over. For a few minutes he was very sick. Afterwards he braced himself against a partition and lifted his head.

I know what to do now, he whispered to his reflection. *Just never be afraid.*

And then he was a little bit sick again.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **VICTOR CANNING**

TITLE: ***Fill the Night With Murder***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: Venice, Italy

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The ex-gondolier had to have 100,000 lire. He was so desperate that any course would seem tempting — even murder . . .*

BARTEO MONDONI WAS LYING FLAT on the cushions in the stern of the launch. His hands folded behind his head, he was staring up into the sun-burnished sky. A few pigeons from the Piazza San Marco flew across the patch of blue. The air was full of the chatter of people moving up and down the waterfront, the cries of hawkers, and the shouts of gondoliers touting for customers.

Humming a little tune to himself, Barteo was inwardly cursing Venice, the people in it, and his own bad luck. Somehow, within the next ten days, he had to find 100,000 lire. If he had any sense, he told himself, he would find it in the same way as he had long ago found enough money to make the step from gondolier to launch proprietor.

Two tourists looked down into the boat and Barteo closed his eyes, pretending to be asleep. He was hired for the afternoon anyway, as he had been every afternoon that week. He lay there, a plump man of forty in a blue shirt and white trousers, his square, browned face topped with black curls. In that moment he decided to do it.

"Barteo!" It was a woman's voice calling from the quay.

Barteo slid off his seat quickly and stood up. A smile cracked his face and his strong white teeth flashed. What a beautiful sight! She stood there in a white silk dress, a red belt about the middle and a touch of red scarf at her throat, and the wind from the water took the lovely sweep of her fair hair and gave it life. Whoever Signor Lampson was, thought Barteo, he was a lucky man to have such a wife — and rich. The rings on her fingers would have paid off the debt

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on Barteo's launch and kept him and his wife, Maria, for years.

"Signora Lampson," he called cheerfully. "*Ben venuto*. . . ." He reached up and helped her into the launch as though she were a princess.

"Barteo," she greeted him. "Always laughing, always gay! This afternoon I have brought a friend and you must sing some of my favorite songs for him."

As she stepped by him, Barteo saw that a man was standing on the quay waiting to come aboard. Barteo gave the man a little bow and then helped him in. At once he disliked him.

This man, he knew at once, wasn't her husband. She had shown him a photograph of her husband, a large, bulky-shouldered man, well into his fifties. "He goes bald, Barteo," she had said, laughing. "That is because he works so hard to make money for me to spend. . . ." No, this man wasn't her husband. He was young and expensive-looking — the kind Barteo saw around Harry's bar — with wide shoulders that fell away to slim hips and a dark, hard-cut face with large, cold eyes. The kind of eyes that remained without expression even when he smiled.

Barteo's afternoon was spoiled. He took them into the shallow lagoons toward Burano. Venice fell back on the skyline in a delicate frieze of towers and domes. He drove fast because Signora Lampson insisted on it, and he sang for them, but his heart wasn't in it, for all the time he could see the two of them sitting in the stern.

Giasone — for he had heard her call him that — could have dropped dead and the launch owner would have been unmoved. Barteo decided that if he had to go back to his old pickpocket ways of finding money he would start with Giasone.

And he did. . . . Two hours later as he helped the pair out of the launch at San Marco, he expertly picked Giasone's wallet from the man's inside pocket! He watched them go off, arm in arm. Then, squatting down by the engine, he opened the wallet; it contained a few letters, a driving license, and 50,000 lire. It was a lucky first haul. In a week if such luck held he would have his 100,000 lire. Giasone wouldn't miss his wallet for some time. By then anyone might have taken it. All Barteo had to do was to throw the empty wallet overboard on his way home. He began to straighten up.

As he did so someone jumped into the launch behind him. He turned quickly to find himself facing Giasone. On the quay was Signora Lampson. Giasone just stared at him with his hard, still eyes. Then he reached back and took Signora Lampson's hand and helped her in.

"Start up and go out," said Giasone curtly.

Barteo looked at Signora Lampson. She was beautiful and poised, but for the first time he saw a hint of ruthlessness about her unsmiling mouth.

"Do as he says, Barteo." There was no warmth in her voice.

Barteo took them out and down toward the Lido and then at a sign

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from Giasone he shut off the engine.

Giasone broke the silence. "You were unlucky, Barteo. A few moments after we left you I wanted to show Signora Lampson a letter from my wallet. Very unlucky."

Barteo took the wallet from his pocket. "Here it is, signor. I ask your forgiveness."

Giasone shook his head. "Keep it. You can tell your story to the police."

"The police? But, signor, is it necessary?" Barteo turned toward Signora Lampson. "Signora, cannot the whole thing be forgotten?"

"Why should it be?"

Fear stirred in Barteo. "But you do not understand, signora. Years ago, when I was a gondolier, I served several sentences for theft. If you take me to the police now, I shall get the maximum sentence . . . and I have been straight for years and years. It will kill my wife. You understand, she has not been well. I have had to spend money on doctors for her and so the installments on this boat have fallen behind. Otherwise, I would not have done this . . . Oh, signora, please understand . . . I had to find the money by the end of the month."

Giasone looked at Signora Lampson. She turned to Barteo.

"Barteo," she said gently, and there was a smile on her face now. "How much do you need to pay off your debt?"

"A hundred thousand lire, signora."

"We could show you a way of earning that, a way out of your troubles, Barteo — if you would help us. We could forget all about the police."

"Signora, I will do anything," said Barteo eagerly.

Giasone chuckled and the sound was like pebbles being washed together by the sea. "It is a little thing, Barteo. But do not try to make fools of us. I have a quick temper. On a dark night a man might find himself in a canal."

"What is it?" asked Barteo.

"Tomorrow Signora Lampson's husband arrives in Venice. You are a man of the world, you will understand that Signora Lampson is no longer interested in her husband, only in his money. It would be convenient if he had an accident. Then I could marry the signora . . . and we should be so happy. You, too, Barteo. We should all be happy."

Barteo knew they were in earnest. They would turn him over to the police as ruthlessly as they planned murder.

"Tomorrow evening," went on Giasone, "you will take the three of us out to Torcello. Signor Lampson wants us to dine at the Locanda Ristorante. He has a passion for the pressed duck they serve there. On the way back you will stop and sing us some songs. Then, unfortunately, Signor Lampson — who will have had too much to drink — will fall overboard. Although we go round and round looking for him he is not picked up. Alas, he cannot swim . . . So simple, so natural."

"But I can't. That would be —"

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"An accident," said Giasone.

"I won't do it!" Barteo shouted.

"So? Then let us go to the police now. *Avanti!*"

But Barteo didn't move. He was in their hands and he knew it. He sat there for a long while and they waited, and in the end he said almost inaudibly, "Very well. I will do it."

"You are sensible, Barteo," said Signora Lampson.

That night Barteo lay in bed by his sleeping wife and tried to find a way out. But he could see none. If he knew where Signor Lampson lived or where he would be staying in Venice, he could tell him the whole story. The man might well pay him the 100,000 lire he needed for the warning and use his influence with the police to quash any charge of theft. But he had no way of finding Signor Lampson. And if he went to the police — who had no love for him anyway — Giasone would deny everything, and he would never get the money he wanted, his boat would be lost . . . and later the blow would come from the darkness.

He spent the next day in misery, sitting in his boat well out in the lagoon, searching for some solution. But at 8:30 he was waiting in his launch for his party to arrive.

"Barteo!"

She was standing on the quay, gay and smiling, her body sheathed in a gold dress, the sparkle of jewels about her neck and arms, a fur across the lovely bare shoulders. So beautiful, he thought, and so evil. With her, in evening dress, was Giasone and another man — Signor Lampson, a big hulking figure with a ponderous, humorous face.

Barteo went forward and helped them all in. They went out across the waters to Torcello, a half hour away. Behind him Barteo could hear them laughing and joking, and the sound made him feel sick. Once Giasone came forward to him and he felt the hard pressure of a gun in his side.

"*Va bene*, Barteo?" The harsh whisper was close to his ear.

He nodded.

He switched the headlight on as they ran into the narrow canal that led up to the landing stage for the Locanda restaurant. He helped them all out and then sat there, watching them as they went up the little stretch of rough road to the Locanda.

It was nearly three hours, close to midnight, when he heard them coming back. As he helped the man aboard, Signor Lampson said, "My wife tells me you're a good singer, Barteo. You must give us some songs on the way back." His breath smelled of wine and he had a couple of bottles under his arm.

"Barteo shall fill the night with song!" called Signora Lampson, and she put her arm about her husband's shoulder and rubbed her cheek against his. Barteo turned away, unable to watch, and started the engine.

From that moment Barteo lived in a black dream full of anxiety. When the lights of Venice were still distant on the steely face of the la-

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goon waters, he stopped the launch and switched off the headlights.

"Song and wine!" shouted Giasone.

Barteo sang, and the bottle went round. Signor Lampson, full of wine and good spirits, joined in. Then, after about ten minutes, it happened. Signor Lampson stood up, announcing that he would sing a song. His great bulk swayed unsteadily. Barteo saw Giasone rise and throw himself against the man. There was a shout, a moment of struggle, and then Signor Lampson was overboard. Giasone jumped forward to Barteo, the automatic in his hand.

"*Avanti! Presto!*"

Barteo started the engine and with a roar the launch moved away into the darkness toward Venice. Not for five minutes would Giasone allow Barteo to put the headlights on.

Barteo sat with Signora Lampson and Giasone in a room on the second floor of the Questura. Outside ran the Rio dei Greci where the launch was moored. Barteo listened to Giasone telling the story of the accident. Signor Lampson had been a little drunk . . . It was so unfortunate . . . They had searched frantically . . . Alas, he could not swim.

Signora Lampson was the picture of a woman numbed with shock. The police captain rested his chin in his hands and nodded now and again. When Giasone had finished, the captain rose and said, "We will send a police launch out to make another search." He nodded at Barteo. "Come, you can take them to the place."

Barteo followed him out of the room and, as he walked, he could feel the stiff crackle of notes from the 100,000 lire which Giasone had paid him on the way back.

When the two were gone Signora Lampson and Giasone sat and waited. They waited so long that Signora Lampson said finally, anxiety moving into her voice, "Why are they so long? Why do they leave us here?"

Giasone shrugged. "You know the police . . . They have no respect for people's feelings." But there was an edge of doubt in his own voice and he got up, glancing at his watch. It was too long. Over an hour. He began to move toward the door, to find someone and make a protest.

But as he neared the door there was the sound of voices from outside and it swung open. Giasone stepped back and Signora Lampson rose and came to his side.

Into the room came the police captain and Barteo. Behind them, wrapped in blankets, was the bulky figure of Signor Lampson.

"*Carol*" cried Signora Lampson, all her woman's quickness coming to her aid.

The police captain said, "Signora Lampson and you, Signor, are under arrest for the attempted murder of Signor Lampson."

Giasone's hand dropped swiftly to his pocket and he turned toward Barteo. "You dirty little —"

Signor Lampson, astonishingly quick for so big a man, jumped forward and

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took Giasone by the wrist, twisting it vigorously. The automatic dropped to the floor.

Signor Lampson picked it up. "Barteo is my friend," he said. "My very good friend. But for him — and I shall repay him handsomely — I should indeed be floating in the lagoon." There was a grim smile of satisfaction on his face as he looked from Giasone to his wife. "When I stepped aboard Barteo's launch in Venice this evening, he stole my wallet. On the way over he slipped a letter into it. At Torcello, as he helped me ashore, he replaced my wallet. He is an expert pickpocket, but no murderer. When I took out my wallet to pay the bill at the restaurant I found the letter. I read it in front of you, but you were too busy looking into one another's eyes to notice. Love is blind . . ."

He laughed. "Barteo explained everything in the letter. He said he would stop the launch in a part of the lagoon where — although far from land — the water was only two feet deep, so I could stand safely waiting for the police to arrive . . ." He reached out and patted Barteo on the shoulder, but Barteo was looking at Signora Lampson. So beautiful in her golden gown . . . so beautiful . . .

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Marvin Rossman's "Mr. Diamond's Diamonds" is one of the twenty-two "first stories" which won special awards in EQMM's Eleventh Annual Contest . . . We think you will agree that "Mr. Diamond's Diamonds" offers nearly everything a reader can expect from a "first story": it is interesting, highly readable, and reveals a slice of life; the author obviously has a warm sympathy for people, and this warmth is successfully projected; in short, it is the kind of story that makes a reader (and an editor) want to see more of the author's work . . .

Mr. Rossman is in his middle 40s. He was born on the lower East Side of Manhattan and brought up in Brooklyn. He grew to manhood during The Great Depression, which meant he had a long series of small-time jobs. Then for several years he worked as a government clerk, served a hitch in the United States Army, spent six months in the Philippines, and is now employed as a union representative in, of all places, Hawaii—where, with his wife and three children, he intends to stay. Ambitions?—to live a useful life (meaning useful to his fellow men) and to write in all his spare time. Mrs. Rossman is also a writer, and it is heart-warming to record that both husband and wife started writing seriously at about the same time and that each sold a "first story" the very same week—Mrs. Rossman to "Modern Romances" and Mr. Rossman to EQMM. Congratulations and best wishes to the whole Rossman family!

MR. DIAMOND'S DIAMONDS

by MARVIN ROSSMAN

EACH TIME I HEARD PAPA TELL about Mr. Diamond's diamonds (which was often), I was fascinated. But the first time, when we lived through it, was the most absorbing.

It started like nothing at all. Papa was having hot tea late at night and as usual he was describing his workday in detail.

"Pugh!" he said. "A blanket of snow in November. As if the barber business isn't bad enough on a Monday without snow. Not a customer for three hours. Poor Diamond, today he made less money than me.

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Today I'm glad he owns the shop."

Mama looked grim. "Even with the bad days I'll bet you Diamond is a rich man, with maybe fifteen hundred to two thousand saved up. And how much do you have?"

Papa let the caustic remark run off his broad stooped shoulders. After twenty years of marriage, Papa and Mama were still so close that he recounted every little item of the day. Her comments only served notice that she was listening.

They seldom interfered with the narrative.

Papa was a good-looking man of medium size. He was as good a talker as most barbers are supposed to be, but are not. He used his hands a great deal in talking, gracefully, much in the style of a conductor of a symphony orchestra. Whenever I visited him at the barber shop I realized that he was not much of a conversationalist there, only at home. But in the shop, holding a comb and brush must have cramped his style. He had one embarrassing feature for a barber—a growing bald spot. His favorite gesture was to cover it with his palm while making a point.

Mama was a comfortable forty and the greatest pleasure of her day was listening to Papa. Not that you could tell this from her comments. A third party—namely, myself—was bound to reach the conclusion that she did not enjoy his chatter. But Papa knew better; and years later, so did I.

"Oh," Papa continued, "I thought the day would be ruined. You know Diamond. Right away he wanted to play checkers to kill time. If only he could play! If you knew how hard it is to lose every third game to him so he won't feel so bad. It's monotonous. But luckily an old man came in and stayed a while."

At this point Papa described the kind of haircut he had given. He also described the customer. This customer, who said his name was Albert Webber, was in his middle sixties and had a big head of gray hair which still showed traces of its original auburn color. He was shabby in his dress and looked like a man who would not spend an extra dime. Papa was proud of the fact that his salesmanship was successful in getting such an unlikely customer to buy a shampoo and tonic. Not only that, the man gave Papa a dime tip.

In the end it turned out the man had a reason for dawdling, and accepted the "treatments" as an excuse to stick around and ask questions. It seemed that Mr. Webber was interested in opening a tailor shop in the empty store next door and he wanted to find out what kind of neighborhood this was for business.

As soon as Papa realized what Mr. Webber had in mind, he tried to dissuade the old man. A waste of money. This was a dead neighborhood. You couldn't drag customers in.

Mr. Diamond, however, gave Pa-

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pa the high sign. He said this was a wonderful neighborhood. He was sure Mr. Webber could make money. Papa caught on. It was bad for business to be on a street with empty stores. And Mr. Diamond liked the idea of having the store next door occupied by a noncompetitive business. It would make the street look more prosperous. Papa did not like the deception, but who was he to quarrel with his boss? He said no more, but when Diamond went into the back room for a minute, Papa winked at the old man and shook his head negatively. The old man returned the wink and shortly thereafter left the shop.

"What do you think of that Diamond?" Papa asked Mama. "I'm glad I didn't let him fool the old man."

"I don't know," said Mama. "Maybe Diamond was right. It might not be so bad for a tailor shop. Besides, you should talk! What do you know about business?"

"About business, nothing. About the street, plenty. And, believe me, on this street there's no business. I'm happy for the old man's sake that we'll never see him again."

"Don't be so sure," was Mama's last word.

The next night Papa's first words were, "Guess what. That fool Webber came back today. He's still interested in opening a store."

The old man had come in early and asked if it would be all right with Mr. Diamond if he stayed a while and watched how many passersby there were on this street before he made up his mind whether to rent the store next door. Mr. Diamond was obliging. After all, Tuesday was not much better for business than Monday. It was still blustery outside and a visitor relieved the monotony.

Mr. Webber turned out to be a quiet one. He just sat and smoked and looked out the window. Toward noon the two barbers heated their tea and unwrapped their lunches. The sad-looking old man accepted tea, but refused food.

Papa, to use his own word, "wormed" some information out of him. Mr. Webber had been fairly well off, with a good tailor shop of his own. But his wife had died about a year ago, shortly afterward he himself had been sick, and he had given up his shop. Since the couple was childless, the old man had gone to live with a nephew, but now he felt out of place and not wanted.

Mr. Diamond said, "With all this misfortune, how can you afford to go into another tailoring business?"

"Oh, I have enough," said Mr. Webber. "After all, what does it take but a pressing machine and a few odds and ends?"

"A few odds and ends," Mr. Diamond mimicked. "What about a neon sign? Racks? Bolts of cloth?"

"I've got five hundred dollars left over from my old business. That should be enough," said the old man.

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"Five hundred dollars." Mr. Diamond, from his lofty position with fifteen hundred, maybe two thousand, in the bank, sniffed. "To go into business you need at least two thousand."

At moments like this Papa hated Mr. Diamond. Such insolence and disrespect for a man thirty years older than himself! And such a fine-looking old man compared with that sallow, skinny Diamond, with his patent-leather hair, pointed sideburns, and mannerisms in pale imitation of the Latin-type movie stars popular in that day.

"Well," was Mama's comment, "he was giving the old man some good advice. Nothing wrong in that."

Papa continued his story.

"If I had two thousand dollars," said Mr. Webber, "hee-hee, hoo-hoo, ho-ho!" and he let the thought dangle on this exclamatory note.

"Ho-ho. And what would you do with two thousand if you had it?" Mr. Diamond asked.

"I assure you if I had two thousand I wouldn't need a retail business. I could be rich and triple my money without slaving in a tailor shop or like you in a barber shop."

"How?" Papa and Mr. Diamond asked the question together.

"Why should I talk about it? I don't have two thousand, and you don't have it, either, Mr. Diamond."

Mr. Diamond assumed a haughty stance.

"Two thousand—and more—I've got in the bank," he stated proudly.

"Really," old man Webber replied. He appeared about to say more, then thought better of it.

Mr. Diamond was becoming annoyed with this shabby-looking man who was wasting his time and drinking his tea. He began to badger him. He called him a pipe dreamer and hinted that Webber was really a pauper without serious intentions of going into business.

"How do I know," said Diamond, "that you aren't one of those fellows that just like to sit around and talk? Maybe you made up this money-tripling stuff just to sound like a big shot, eh?"

Papa blushed at Diamond's rudeness.

Mr. Webber rose swiftly.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Diamond, that you feel this way. I'll tell you what I meant. My nephew, the one I live with, is a smuggler. Not stolen goods, mind you. But he brings things in without the tax—the tariff, you understand. A little illegal, you know, but nothing really wrong. And right now he has some diamonds he needs to unload. A private person, an honest man with no record, could make a mint. But I've said too much already. Goodbye!" And he slammed the door so hard that icicles fell from the awning into the street.

Mr. Diamond laughed to the point of tears.

"Listen to him: Diamonds. Smugglers. That beggar!"

Papa was not amused. Imagine

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laughing at an old man like that.

Mama said, "When you have two thousand dollars in the bank you can afford to laugh at people. But you, you'd better keep your mouth shut."

"What's a smuggler?" I asked.

"You go to bed," was her answer.

But that was not the last we heard of Mr. Webber. On Wednesday he was back, on the sidewalk in front of the shop, still obviously insulted. He stood off to one side shivering in the cold and counting the number of potential customers that passed on the street. After a half hour of this Papa asked his boss for permission to invite the old man in out of the cold. Diamond shrugged as though it made no difference to him.

No sooner had Mr. Webber entered the store than Mr. Diamond took up his badgering of the day before.

"Well, Webber, didn't your rich nephew give you a diamond today?"

Mr. Webber sighed. "With my nephew everything is strictly business. I'm afraid he doesn't have too much love for his old uncle."

"You really have such a nephew?" Mr. Diamond asked.

"Please don't insult me again," said Webber. "Why should I lie? Of course I have."

"You know, I would like to meet this nephew of yours."

But the old man shook his head. "I'm lucky he lets me stay at his house. If I brought you home, he'd throw us both out. And how can I bring him here? On what excuse? He gets his haircuts at the Great Central Barber Shop."

"Maybe he'd sell me some diamonds," said Papa's boss, with a broad wink over the old man's head at Papa.

"You're not joking, Mr. Diamond?" the old man inquired.

"No, I'd really buy some diamonds. I'm always open to new ways to make money."

"Please, Mr. Diamond, don't make fun of me. If I bring my nephew and it's for nothing, he'll—he'll make me regret the day I was born."

"Who's making fun? Ask my worker here. Do I ever make fun? I'm always in the market for a good buy in diamonds."

"All right," said the old man. "I can't guarantee it, but I'll try. My nephew, you understand, is a very busy man."

He left the store, a dejected figure.

"Well, I got rid of that old crank for good," said Mr. Diamond.

Papa felt inclined to defend Webber, but without deep conviction. Maybe, he told his boss, the old "crank" did have a smuggler-nephew.

At this point in the narrative, Mama ceased her sewing and asked, "And he didn't fire you for contradicting him?"

No, Papa answered her. On the contrary, Mr. Diamond laughed as if this was the funniest thing he had heard in years. In fact, all the rest of

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the day he continued to laugh. He would stop in the middle of cutting a customer's hair, point his scissors at Papa, say a word like "nephew," or "smuggler," or "diamonds," and burst into laughter. In this way he let Papa know how stupid he was to believe Webber's fairy tale.

The next three days were the busy ones in the shop. Webber seemed to have vanished and Papa reluctantly had to admit that the old man had probably lied. On Saturday night Papa sat soaking his feet after a grueling twelve-hour shift. He was always most discouraged on Saturday nights, and he admitted to Mama that the Webber incident appeared definitely closed.

But the following Monday night he came home spry and excited. He could not wait to take off his coat. Instead of "Hello," his first words were, "He came."

"Who came?" asked Mama and I in one breath.

"The nephew," said Papa.

"What nephew?" asked Mama.

"Webber's nephew! Who else?" said Papa. "In a Rolls-Royce or something!"

About the middle of the morning this limousine drove up to the barber shop. The driver was wearing a chauffeur's cap. The first passenger to emerge was Mr. Webber, looking as seedy as ever. Following him came an imposing younger man, big and beefy (like a politician, was Papa's description). He wore a Homburg hat and a double-breasted overcoat with a fur collar. In his mouth was a big fat cigar.

He entered the store briskly, the older man tagging timidly behind. Mr. Webber made the introductions.

"This is my nephew, Mr. Samuel Taylor, and this is Mr. Diamond and his assistant, Mr. . . . ah . . ."

"How ja do!" said Papa politely.

Diamond seemed too stunned to acknowledge the introduction. Mr. Taylor came to the point at once.

"Mr. Diamond, I understand you told my uncle you're interested in the purchase of a few gems?"

"Well, I—I—I did say that."

Papa was torn between laughter at his boss's discomfiture and pity for the possible consequences to Mr. Webber when it turned out that Diamond was a four-flusher.

Mr. Taylor took off his hat and removed a small, neatly folded silk handkerchief from the sweatband. Taylor had a magnificent shock of black hair that Papa's experienced eye told him at once was a toupee. It was a very good toupee, worth, Papa estimated, two hundred dollars. This must be a very important man, Papa decided.

Taylor unfolded the handkerchief and revealed eight beautiful-looking diamonds.

"I have only eight diamonds with me. Each one is worth at least seven hundred fifty dollars. But I've got to turn them over fast. You can have the lot for twenty-four hundred, cash."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Taylor," the

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owner of the barber shop sparred. "Before I'd go into a proposition like this I'd have to be absolutely sure. In the first place—if you'll excuse me, Mr. Taylor—how do I know these diamonds are genuine?"

"You don't know diamonds?" And Taylor took one and placed it in Mr. Diamond's hands.

Papa's boss handled it as if it was burning his fingers.

"Sure. I can see this is a beautiful diamond. But I'm not a jeweler, even if my name is Diamond, ha-ha," he said with a sickly attempt at humor.

"Sure, sure. You're entitled to an appraisal. Take it to any jeweler in town. Tell him it fell out of your wife's ring or something."

Mr. Diamond swallowed hard and said apologetically, "If you don't mind, could I have a different diamond for the appraisal?"

Taylor looked hard at Mr. Diamond. Papa held his breath, wondering how his boss had the effrontery to be so crude to this fine gentleman. Unexpectedly, Taylor's hard look dissolved into a grin.

"I see I'm dealing with a smart businessman. Good. Here, have them *all* appraised. But remember, take each one to a different jeweler. Eight diamonds like these, you can't say they all fell out of your wife's ring."

"No," said Diamond, with regained dignity. "You trust me, so I'll trust you. Just one stone will be enough. Suppose I take that big one."

It was settled that way. Taylor and his uncle, Mr. Webber, left. Mr. Diamond admired the gem in his hands.

"Before this fellow gets any money out of me," he told Papa, "I'll make sure, a thousand times over, that he's not tricking me."

"A smart man, your Mr. Diamond," Mama told Papa.

"What's so smart about him?" Papa answered, in one of those rare instances when he permitted her comment to halt his story. Indeed, it was the end of the story for the night. Mama and Papa began a long-drawn-out argument about Mr. Diamond's brains, from which I was excluded with the admonition to go to bed.

The next morning Papa had the barber shop all to himself. Mr. Diamond took the diamond to have it appraised. He returned shortly before noon full of excitement.

"It's real!" he told Papa. "The jeweler says this stone alone is worth nine hundred dollars."

"So?" asked Papa.

"So what?" said Mr. Diamond. "What would you do?"

"Excuse me, Mr. Diamond. I don't have any two thousand dollars. Not even nine hundred. So I can't give advice. But if I did have it," Papa advised, "I know one thing. I wouldn't put all my eggs in one basket."

Mr. Diamond did a lot of pacing that day. He toyed with the gem. He clapped it into the cash register.

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A moment later he rang up "No Sale" and checked to see if the diamond was still there. He took both sides of the argument in a futile attempt to get Papa's advice on whether or not he should make the investment.

Early in the afternoon Mr. Taylor breezed in, authoritative, businesslike, a freshly lit cigar in his face.

"Well," he inquired, "is the diamond all you expected?"

"It's a good stone, all right. I guess I can go three hundred on it."

"Fine. Here are the other seven. You got the cash?"

Mr. Diamond said, "Not for all of them. This one diamond for three hundred I'm ready to buy."

"No deal," said Taylor. "I can't be selling diamonds all over town. You want the lot for twenty-four hundred, okay they're yours. If not, that's your tough luck. You'll nick an awful lot of ears before you get another crack at this kind of profit. As for me, I'll know better in the future than to listen to my two-bit uncle and his two-bit friends."

He folded all the diamonds neatly in the little silk handkerchief and tucked the packet into his hat, clapped the Homburg onto his magnificent toupee, and strode to the door. His hand was on the knob when Mr. Diamond stopped him.

"Mr. Taylor! Wait a minute! Maybe we can still do business."

"Yes or no?" said Taylor, his hand still on the knob.

"To tell the truth, I only meant that I don't carry this much money in my pocket. I could go to the bank tomorrow."

"Why didn't you say so?"

Taylor removed his hat once more and took the little packet from the sweatband. He slapped it onto the marble counter before the mirror.

"All right, I'll give you a day to get the cash. But no games. Nobody plays games with Sam Taylor. And no denomination over a hundred-dollar bill, please. The diamonds are yours and I consider them sold."

No sooner had the big man sped away in his chauffeured limousine than Mr. Diamond pounced on the packet of gems. He eyed them with hunger.

"Here," he said to Papa. "You take over the store again. I'm going to take these stones around to different jewelry stores and get all of them appraised."

It was almost closing time when he returned.

"They're good!" he told Papa. "They're all good. They're worth over five thousand dollars wholesale! That old Webber was no liar after all. And if I set them in rings I could easily triple my investment. What shall I do? It's terrible!"

"What's terrible?" asked Papa in amazement.

"I haven't got that much!" his boss shouted. "I haven't got twenty-four hundred dollars in the bank!"

"You're kidding, Mr. Diamond," said Papa, secretly amused.

"Well," said Mr. Diamond. "So I

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exaggerated a little. But I didn't lie. Eighteen hundred I can lay my hands on, but that's all. Maybe you've got the other six hundred? We could go partners. On a seventy-five percent, twenty-five percent split."

"Me?" said Papa. "You could tear pieces out of me, Mr. Diamond, and you wouldn't find even sixty dollars, I assure you."

As Papa reached this point in his narrative, Mama began to inflict large pinches on her cheeks and ample arms.

"Stop!" she cried. "You're killing me. Here's a gold mine in our hands, and we can't take advantage of it. Stop!"

And Papa stopped. Not because of Mama's outburst, but because that night there was nothing more to tell.

The next night Mama and I could hardly wait for the latest installment in the saga of Mr. Diamond's diamonds.

Diamond, said Papa, completely lost his superior air while waiting for Mr. Taylor's return. He sweated visibly each time the door opened to admit a customer and a gust of frosty air.

Both barbers were busy when Taylor arrived. Mr. Diamond jumped so hard he made a little slice on the customer's neck with his razor. Even Papa got so excited that the boy in his chair got a haircut that looked more like July than November.

Taylor puffed impatiently on his fat cigar until the little shop became foggy. When the customers left, he said, "Well, Diamond, are you set to close this deal?"

Mr. Diamond was timid but determined.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Taylor. From what my appraisers say, I can only give you eighteen hundred for the stones."

Papa gasped at this effrontery.

Taylor said, "Give me back those stones! I didn't come here to haggle!"

"But Mr. Taylor, can't we talk this over?"

"Give me the diamonds!" He advanced on Papa's boss menacingly.

Mr. Diamond cringed and hastily handed the big man the packet. Taylor snatched it from him. He examined the contents, then returned the packet to the inner band of his hat. He glared at Mr. Diamond.

"Mister, you better talk fast if you know what's good for you. I told you yesterday nobody plays games with Sam Taylor. Why'd you ask me to come back if you didn't want to do business on my terms?"

"To tell you the truth," said Diamond, "to tell you the honest truth, Mr. Taylor, I haven't got more than eighteen hundred dollars to my name. But that much I can give you in cash, here, right now." His voice was pleading.

"You sure you can't raise more than that?"

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Mr. Diamond put his hands together like a man praying and raised his eyes heavenward.

"I swear it. As I want my children to live, I'm telling the truth."

The smuggler's belligerency relaxed. He said, "This I can understand. Why didn't you say so in the first place? I'll tell you what. If you've only got eighteen hundred, I'll let you have six of the eight stones. That's fair, isn't it?"

"Sure. Sure," said Mr. Diamond with great eagerness.

Once again Taylor produced the silk handkerchief.

"Okay. Any six you want. You pick them out."

"Well, Mr. Taylor, since you're so nice to let me buy into this deal after all, I'm not going to be a hog. I won't pick only the biggest ones. That second and third smallest you can take back."

For an answer Mr. Taylor boomed his big politician's laugh, and in a few seconds the money and the diamonds exchanged hands.

Out of respect for the wealthy Mr. Taylor, Papa saw him to the door and waved goodbye as the big limousine pulled away. Inside the shop Mr. Diamond was spinning around in his barber chair like a kid on a merry-go-round.

"Yes," said Mama, "and a hundred and twenty years from now you'll still be cutting hair!"

A month passed, during which our family speculated frequently on the exact amount of profit Mr. Diamond would make. Each night Papa came home full of joy.

"Honest, Mama," he said. "It's no fun to be rich. I'm poor but I've got no worries."

"Except the rent, the lights, and the groceries!"

Papa ignored her. "But Diamond, he's not so happy any more. What shall he do with his diamonds? He doesn't know. He can't deposit them in the bank. He's afraid to leave them in the register, maybe they'll be stolen. He's afraid to tell anybody about them—he might be arrested as a fence or something. Even his wife doesn't know. I tell you he's like a man haunted by a terrible ghost."

One day we heard from Papa that Mr. Diamond had decided to dispose of his treasure. The next night we learned the ghastly news. Mr. Diamond had taken the smallest stone to a jeweler. He asked what it would cost to have it set in a platinum ring. He was advised that for such a piece of glass a cheap setting was sufficient. Stunned, Diamond inquired what the jeweler meant by a piece of glass. The jeweler told him the "diamond" was nothing but paste—it was false! Panicky, the barber took the stone to another store, this time for a straight appraisal. His worst fears were confirmed.

He rushed back to the shop where he had left the rest of the "diamonds." He took the other five to several stores. Glass—all were glass!

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The owner of the shop was red-eyed with crying, said Papa, on his second return.

"Who? What? How?" interrupted Mama.

"I know," said Papa. "I know. It was that business with the hat. Taylor put the diamonds under the band and then took them out. Only the second time he took out the glass ones. That was why he acted so mad at poor Diamond. It was just an excuse to get his hands on the good stones, put them under the sweatband of his hat, and then make the switch."

"And you knew it?" asked Mama.

"Of course not! That smooth-talking Taylor fooled me too. But, Mama, I'll tell you what I did do. I looked at his license plate number and wrote it down."

"You told Diamond?"

"No."

"Run right away! Tell him! He could catch that thief yet."

"No, Mama. I want to handle this my own way."

"Our worst troubles come from your 'handling.'" The remark was sharp as ever, but in Mama's eyes there was a look of wonder—and great respect.

Early the next morning Papa got dressed in his best suit. His hat and coat were carefully brushed. His shoes had a high luster. He looked, said Mama, like a regular professional man, maybe even an insurance salesman. He instructed me to stop in at Mr. Diamond's house on my way to school and to tell his boss that he wasn't feeling well and was taking the day off.

We did not see Papa again till late that night. Mama kept cracking her knuckles and sighing. She sent me to bed twenty times but hugged me tenderly each time I sneaked out and asked where Papa was. And each time she choked back tears.

When Papa came home he looked different. A button was torn from his coat. The coat itself was spattered with slush. His shoes were wet and showed their age. And I could hardly believe my eyes—he had a black eye!

Still, he didn't look too unhappy. Mama made a big fuss over him. She made him comfortable, poured him some tea, and waited for him to launch into an account of the day's adventures.

First Papa had gone to City Hall. There he inquired about locating a man from the license plate number of his automobile. The clerk gave him unintelligible instructions. The only thing he could grasp was that the information he needed was in another building several blocks away.

Papa went to the second building. Here he found such a welter of corridors, cashier cages, and booths that he circled the lobby in despair. A municipal hanger-on, in search of just such helpless-looking individuals, came to his rescue. Papa explained his problem. The stranger said it would cost Papa two and a

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half dollars for the information. Papa replied that he would gladly pay it once the information was his.

The man agreed. He steered Papa to a booth and helped him to fill out certain papers. He then took Papa around to various cages and officials and within a half hour Papa had the information he wanted.

It turned out that the license belonged to Joe's U-Drive Limousine Service on Gay Street. This was disappointing to Papa, but he proceeded to follow the lead.

Joe himself was willing to help. He looked through his record of customers for the week mentioned by Papa, but the names Taylor and Webber were not there. He suggested that Papa question the three chauffeurs employed to drive Joe's limousines. One of them might remember Taylor and Webber.

Papa hit pay dirt with the second driver.

"Yeah, I remember the big guy who had me stop at a barber shop a couple of times. Wall Street man, he said. Big head. Big hat. Big cigar. Big tipper. Wore a fur collar, didn't he?"

"That's the man! You know his name?"

"Schuyler. But I don't know the name of the old guy with him."

"You took him home? Maybe you can remember where he lives, this Schuyler?"

"Well," said the driver, "how much is this information worth to you?"

"I'm a poor man," replied Papa. "But I assure you this information is worth a great deal to me."

"He was a big tipper."

"How much is a big tip?" asked Papa nervously.

"Three bucks."

Papa pulled out his old-fashioned purse with the little brass clip. He cautiously withdrew three dollar bills. The driver chewed gum and pretended not to watch.

"The Cruise Hotel on 21st Street," said the driver. "You will find this guy Schuyler lives there. And thanks."

Papa hastened to the Cruise Hotel. No one by the name of Schuyler, Taylor, or Webber had been registered there within the past month. The clerk was absolutely sure.

Papa described the two swindlers.

"Sellers and Webb!" said the clerk. "What do you know about them?"

"They swindled my boss out of his life's savings and I'm trying to find them," replied Papa.

"They swindled us out of a month's rent!" said the clerk.

It soon became clear that Papa and the desk clerk could only commiserate with each other. There was no other clue.

Papa started for home, dejected. He was on a bus looking out the window. The chill December air had steamed the windows, so he rubbed the glass with his fingers to discern his whereabouts. A neon sign flickered a green message, *Great Central*

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Barber Shop. Papa closed his eyes. He still had a long ride home.

Behind his eyelids he could still see the green words, *Great Central Barber Shop*. The picture would not go away. Then he knew why. That remark of Webber's about his nephew, "He gets his haircuts at the Great Central Barber Shop!"

Papa tugged the signal cord. The bus halted. Papa hurried back two blocks and went into the Great Central Barber Shop. This was a swank place with ten chairs, a manicurist, and a shoeshine boy. None of the barbers had bald spots. Papa knew the manager, Mr. Armetti.

"Hello, Mr. Armetti," said Papa.

"What's the matter? You not working at Diamond's place any more?" asked Armetti.

"I'm working, but I got a favor to ask you."

"No jobs. And anyway, you know the setup. The boss only hires these curly-headed young guys." The last was said with sympathy.

"Nothing like that. I'm looking for a man named Taylor, or Schuyler, or Sellers, and a Webber who might be named Webb. They swindled Mr. Diamond out of eighteen hundred dollars."

Armetti was interested and asked for details. Papa supplied them and described the two men. Armetti could not place them.

"This Taylor wears a wig," Papa told him. "An expensive wig, for the top only. His own hair on the sides is bushy enough. To be so well groomed, I'm sure he gets his hair cut every two weeks."

That registered.

"I bet I know who you mean. But he can't be a swindler. Big Wall Street man. I don't know his name, but he's a nice gentleman. Good tipper, too."

"That's the one!" said Papa.

Armetti was not convinced. Just the same, Papa prevailed on him to let him stay and watch for Taylor, who was due in that day.

"I'll wait in the back of the shop and, if you don't mind, I'll keep my hat on and read the papers. He saw me only in a barber's coat and without a hat. I'm sure he won't recognize me."

Papa sat down about eight chairs from the front. He kept scanning the faces of all who entered. It was over an hour before his patience was rewarded. Mr. Taylor-Schuyler-Sellers breezed in, as prosperous-looking and self-confident as ever. When he was finished he handed out tips to the barber, the manicurist, and the shoeshine boy. Then he left. A few paces behind, Papa followed.

"And he saw you and hit you in the eye!" was Mama's quick conclusion.

Not so fast, said Papa. In fact, the big man seemed so absorbed in his own self-importance, he walked with great strides, his head high, never suspecting that Papa was almost running to keep him in sight. Finally Taylor turned into a big apartment house.

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Papa took note of the number and rushed immediately in search of a policeman. He found one at a busy intersection nearby.

"Officer, please! I want you to arrest a swindler."

"Sure," said the policeman. "But what's it all about?"

"He sold my boss some fake diamonds. Quick! I saw the man go into a house in the next street. Come, I'll show you."

The policeman pulled out a notebook.

"Let's get the facts on this. First, what is your name?"

Papa looked at him in amazement. Thousands of policemen in the city and he had to pick this one! He did not even look like a cop. He was young and he spoke as politely as a schoolteacher. And like a schoolteacher he asked Papa a lot of time-consuming questions . . .

Papa answered patiently. All the while he was thinking to himself, if America was on fire this young fool would ask questions for his notebook instead of grabbing a bucket of water.

When the questioning was over, the policeman said, "Okay, now show me the house."

Papa led the way. The policeman looked at the apartment building from across the street and wrote the number in his book.

"Good," he said. "Now, sir, would you, or better yet this Mr. Diamond, come down to the station and make a complaint?"

"I'm complaining now. Isn't that enough for you to arrest him on?"

The policeman gave Papa a lecture. He used the words "warrant," "investigation," and "surveillance." Papa didn't understand it at all.

"Excuse me, Officer. I'd better turn this over to my boss, Mr. Diamond. I've never been in a police station and I never want to be. This part Mr. Diamond better take care of himself."

He got away from the officer as quickly as he could, walked to the end of the block, and turned the corner. Then he hastily retraced his steps and went back to the apartment house. The door to the foyer was not locked. There were two rows of doorbells on either side. Papa hunted through the names on one side. No Taylor, Schuyler, Seller, Webber, or Webb. He tried the doorbells on the other side and again drew a blank. He returned to the first list and began to go down the names more slowly. In the midst of this operation he was interrupted.

"Can I help you?" said a voice.

Papa turned and saw Albert Webber. The old man was changed. Instead of the shabby clothing, he had on a dark camel's-hair coat. His gloves were fawn-colored. A silk muffler was bunched carefully at his throat. The new snap-brim hat matched his gloves and was worn at an angle that Papa associated with the horse bookies that sometimes came into the barber shop.

"It's the barber," said Webber.

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"Oh, am I glad to see you!" Papa lied.

"Yeah—why?"

"Well—well, I've been looking for you. I've really been looking for your nephew, Mr. Taylor—because, well, because I want to buy some diamonds, too."

"What did your boss do with the other rocks?" Mr. Webber's very voice was different. It was coarser.

"Oh, them. He still has them. But ever since Mr. Diamond got such a bargain, my wife has been after me to get some, too, and I've been trying to find your nephew. You don't know how hard I've been trying."

"I don't believe you."

"Please, Mr. Webber, it's the truth. But if you feel like this, excuse me. I must go now, if you don't mind."

Webber pulled a gun from his pocket and pointed it at Papa.

Keeping Papa covered, Webber ordered him into the inner lobby and over to a self-service elevator. They entered it. The elevator rose to the fifth floor.

Papa was ushered along a hallway to Apartment 5-C. The name on the door read *Sennett.* Mr. Taylor opened the door.

"What's this!" he demanded of Webber.

"You remember the barber from Diamond's place? He was downstairs checking our doorbell. Says he wants to buy some diamonds."

"And you brought him up here!" Taylor glared and puffed so hard on his cigar that the tip glowed.

"What should I do? He recognized me. Should I turn him loose so he can run to the cops?"

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said Papa. "I think maybe I better go."

Taylor took charge. He waved Webber's gun aside, put a friendly arm around Papa's shoulder, and forced Papa down into an armchair.

"Uncle, maybe we should explain to our friend that in the smuggling business we must be extra-careful. You can understand that, Mr. Barber. Now tell me, how did you find us?"

Papa told how a chance remark of Mr. Webber's had led him to the Great Central Barber Shop. Taylor turned angry eyes on the old man. Webber just shrugged. Papa changed part of the story.

"When I described you to Mr. Armetti, he said you just left the shop, Mr. Taylor. So I ran after you. But you were more than a block ahead and you walk so fast. You got in the door before I could reach you. Still, if you don't trust me, maybe I should go home now. My wife will be worried."

Mr. Taylor retained his affable manner. The cigar never left his mouth. He leaned down and took hold of Papa's lapels intimately. Then he lifted Papa bodily out of the chair and just as quickly crashed him back into it. His cigar came dangerously close to Papa's nose.

"Now, barber, why did you come here?"

"I already told you, Mr. Taylor.

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I've got six hundred dollars to buy diamonds."

"Six hundred. With you?"

"No. At home. I can get it if you let me go."

"Let's take care of him," said the old man.

"Yes, uncle. We'll take care of him." And, to Papa, Taylor said, "Let me straighten your coat. You understand we've got to be careful. So, to make sure nothing happens to you, we're going with you. For me, six hundred dollars is chicken feed, but seeing you're a friend of my old uncle, I'll personally take care of you."

His old uncle Webber sneered. A few minutes later Papa and his two companions were in the elevator going down. At the ground floor Taylor swung the door open. At this moment two men entered the lobby. One was Papa's recent acquaintance, the schoolteacherish policeman. The other was a burly man in plain clothes.

Papa got out just one word, *"Help!"*

Taylor barred the way by shutting the elevator door. Papa could see the two men rushing to the elevator. It was then he got his black eye. He thought it was the old man who hit him in the face with the butt of a gun. The lights seemed to go out in the elevator, except for a circle of bright orange followed by a purple flash in front of his injured eye. He felt the elevator tilt over so that he fell against a wall. The darkness then became complete and he was floating upward in space . . .

When consciousness returned, Papa looked into the face of the policeman, who was saying, "You okay?"

Papa nodded. He had difficulty speaking because his face hurt.

Finally, he found his voice.

"Those crooks. They got away."

"Don't worry about them. There was no place for them to go after the top floor. And you were right. I had them checked. They're wanted, all right. From here to breakfast! Do you think you're in shape to come down to the station and give a full report?"

Papa was and he did.

"And those swindlers, those thieves, those murderers, they're locked up good and tight?" asked Mama.

"Yes."

Papa reached into his pocket for his cigarettes. His hand came out holding them, also a small bright piece of glass.

"Those crooks must have put this in my pocket when I was unconscious on the elevator floor. I bet it's some kind of evidence."

"Maybe it is a real one," Mama said enthusiastically. "Get it appraised! This could be the beginning of our good fortune!"

"No, Mama. Appraisals are for smart businessmen like my boss, Mr. Diamond. I better show this to the police."

"Don't talk to me about that big dope, Diamond," sniffed Mama.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: MARGIE SWANN

TITLE: *Sunday in Our Town*

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: A small town in the United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *An authentic American Gothic, in the tradition of Spoon River and Winesburg, Ohio, and the grimmer New England villages. One reader's report: "a tart and enjoyable tale of grue."*

USUALLY THE STREETS IN OUR town are empty on Sunday mornings, but this Sunday there were people everywhere, gathered in little bunches. I didn't stop to talk to any of them though, and they didn't say anything to me, because I keep to myself, always have, and they know it. They might call me an old maid, but nobody in this town has ever called me a gossip.

Just walking along the street though, I couldn't help hearing them saying Bernie Brewster's name several times. Bernie isn't very bright. He's about nineteen years old, but he never did get past the fourth grade in school, and when his mother died a couple of years ago, Wesley Gillian and his wife, Anna, took Bernie in to live with them. Not that they had much choice in the matter. They haven't got any children of their own, and what with Mr. Gillian being the Sunday-school teacher, besides owning the drug store and theater, folks sort of expected them to do it.

Well, as I said, I didn't pay any attention to what was being said but just as I reached the drug store, who should come out but Anna Gillian. I turned my head the other way, but nothing less than a ton of bricks can hurt Anna's feelings. "Saraphine," she started in the minute she spied me, "did you hear what happened?"

"No," I told her, "and I don't care."

"Well, they found Rosalie Mead's body! Down by the river. She'd been murdered—with Bernie's knife! You know that knife he always carries around, with his initials on it—"

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"Anna," I began, "I do not wish—"

"Poor Rosalie," she went right on, "I knew she'd get into trouble some day, running around with every man in town, even the married ones. But I never thought—"

That's when I walked off, right in the middle of her sentence. And it served her right. She knows I keep to myself. I wouldn't have been downtown at all if I didn't have to go up to the church to look for a pair of gloves I'd lost.

The church is up on the hill at the edge of town and I was about halfway there when Bernie himself came galloping barefooted out of the brush along the path, that straight white hair of his standing up all over his head.

"Boy is Mr. Gillian gonna be mad," he said, "because I'm late for Sunday school."

I thought to myself that they should have arrested him by now if they really thought he'd killed Rosalie. But then they probably hadn't been able to catch up with him. He had a habit of drifting around town talking to whoever would listen, and sometimes he would even go up in the hills and stay overnight.

"Did you know I'm gonna work for Mr. Jackson this summer, on his ranch?" he said.

"Yes," I said, "you've told me all about it before, Bernie." He'd told everybody in town about it, over and over again.

"Boy it's gonna be fun, workin' for Mr. Jackson. He's a good guy."

"I *know*, Bernie. You've told me!"

We had reached the church, and I pushed him inside the door. Let Mr. Gillian take him to jail, or whatever. It was his place. Then I went on around to the back door. It was unlocked and I went in, walked quietly along the hall, and entered the cloakroom from the hall door.

I looked on the table but I couldn't find my gloves, and then I noticed a stack of song books. Right then I thought I knew what had happened. Somebody had piled all those books on top of my gloves just hoping I'd never think of looking there for them; and if that somebody was Anna Gillian, she had a big surprise coming to her because I wasn't leaving any pair of gloves there for her to take home with her! Trying to be quiet about it, I began moving the books one by one.

The door that opens on the meeting room, where Sunday school was being held, and where regular church meeting is held on Sunday evenings, was halfway open and when I looked out I could see the row and a half of children sitting there. Bernie was seated at one end and he was a whole head and shoulders taller than the others.

I could see Wesley Gillian too, standing in front of his class, looking handsome as usual with his wavy blond hair combed so carefully, and with his new tan suit on.

"—and it was because of this," he was saying to the class, "that Cain k-i-l-l-e-d his—"

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"That spells *killed*," yelled out Jackie Ritter.

Mr. Gillian rapped for silence.

"Well," said Jackie, "why do you always have to spell everything anyway? You're always spelling things!"

There were snickers from most of the children, and from Bernie a loud braying noise which seems to be his idea of a laugh.

Mr. Gillian rapped sharply again.

"I spell some of the words," he said, "because there are some things it is better for the smaller children not to know about."

"Well, I know anyway," said Jackie. "K-i-l-l-e-d spells *killed*."

"That will do!" Mr. Gillian looked mad enough to rap Jackie's knuckles with the ruler he held in his hand. But he just laid the ruler down, looked at his watch, and dismissed the class.

I went back to moving the books, down to the very last one, but my gloves weren't there. I looked all around the room again but couldn't find them, so I started to go into the meeting room; but then I saw that Mr. Gillian and Bernie were still there. And Mr. Gillian was giving Bernie a good talking to.

"Never mind why we were looking for you," he was telling him. "We've warned you time and again not to go running off without telling us where you're going. It seems to me, after Anna and I have been good enough to take you into our home—"

"Boy next week I'll go to Mr. Jackson's ranch," said Bernie.

"Stop interrupting me!" yelled Mr. Gillian.

Bernie's face became serious. And then suddenly he came out with that bray of his again. He whacked Mr. Gillian on the shoulder. "Boy you're smart," he said. "You sure fooled everybody, huh? They're huntin' all over for Rosalie, and nobody knows you killed her."

I was so shocked I didn't notice how white Mr. Gillian's face had turned until he reached out and grabbed Bernie by both arms.

"What are you talking about?" he demanded. "What makes you say I killed Rosalie?"

Bernie looked surprised and tried to back away.

"Answer me!" shouted Mr. Gillian.

Bernie frowned. "Because last night, when you and Mrs. Gillian were havin' that fight, you spelled it."

Mr. Gillian shook him. "Spelled what?"

"K-i-l-l-e-d. And Jackie says that spells—"

"Shut up!" He shook Bernie again. "Go ahead," he said, "tell me everything you heard last night."

Bernie was looking miserable. "Well—well, you and Mrs. Gillian were havin' this fight and she said she thought you knew where Rosalie was and she said she knew all about you and Rosalie and—"

"And what?"

"Then you acted kind of sick, and then you said, 'Anna, I k-i-l-l-e-d

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Rosalie, I had to.' And then she looked kind of sick too and she said she'd help you figure a way out of it, and—and that's when you sent me to the store."

Without making a sound, I moved back through the cloakroom and left the church the way I had come. But when I got back downtown I stopped at Sheriff Braburn's house.

His wife came to the door. She looked surprised to see me standing there. "If you'll be so good as to hand me a pencil and a piece of paper," I said to her, "I'll just leave a little note for the sheriff and be on my way."

"Oh," she said, "he's home. There's no need to leave a note. I'll call him."

"If you don't mind," I said, "I'll leave a note."

So she got the pencil and paper and I wrote the note and handed it to her. Then I left before she could start up any conversation.

That evening, when I went back up the hill to church, I could tell something else must have happened because there was a bigger crowd than usual standing around outside, and everybody seemed to be talking at once. I went straight inside, right to the back of the church, and took my usual seat.

I wasn't there more than a few minutes when Anna Gillian came in and made her way to where I sat.

"We feel so awful about Bernie," she said. "After all he was practically our son."

I picked a song book out of the rack and began going through it, ignoring her.

"You heard what happened to Bernie, didn't you?" she went on. "He killed himself. Took some rat poison. I guess he knew that was the best way out for him. Mr. Jackson sure feels bad about it, you know Bernie was going to work on his ranch this summer. He always liked Bernie and he keeps saying he can't understand why Bernie would kill Rosalie. Of course, nobody else can either, but then I guess we'll never know, will we?"

Just then I saw Sheriff Braburn come in the door. He noticed me and came straight to where I was sitting. "I got your note, Miss Wills," he said. He fished in his pocket and brought out my lost gloves. "Too bad you didn't wait this morning, I could have given them to you then. Jackie Ritter found them last Sunday and turned them in to me. With all this other trouble we've been having, I'd forgotten all about them."

"Thank you," I said, and took my gloves. Of course, I could have stood up right then and told him and everybody else what I'd heard that morning, but I didn't. I may be an old maid, but I am not a gossip. I keep to myself—as I told you in the first place.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MURIEL SPARK**

TITLE: ***The Girl I Left Behind Me***

TYPE: Suspense Story

LOCALE: London

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Frenzied or absent-minded Mr. Letter (Screws & Nails) whistled "The Girl I Left Behind Me" almost perpetually. His young secretary simply couldn't get the tune out of her head.*

IT WAS JUST A QUARTER PAST SIX when I left the office. *Teedle-um-tum-tum*—there was the tune again, going round in my head. Mr. Letter had been whistling it all through the day, between his noisy telephone calls and his dreamy sessions. Sometimes he whistled *Softly, Softly, Turn the Key,* but usually it was *The Girl I Left Behind Me* rendered at a brisk hornpipe tempo.

I stood in the bus queue, tired out, wondering how long I could endure Mark Letter (Screws & Nails), Ltd. Of course, after my long illness, I needed the work. But Mr. Letter and his tune, his sudden moods of bounce, his sudden lapses into lassitude, his sandy hair and little bad teeth, roused my resentment, especially when his tune barreled round in my head long after I had left the office. It was like taking Mr. Letter home with me.

No one at the bus stop took any notice of me. Well, of course, why should they? I was not acquainted with anyone there, but that evening I felt particularly anonymous among all the home-goers. Everyone looked right through me and even, it seemed, walked through me. Late autumn always sets my fancy toward sad ideas. The starlings were crowding in to roost on all the high cornices of the great office buildings. And I located, in the misty unease of my feelings, a very strong conviction that I had left something important behind me or some job unfinished at the office. Perhaps I had left the safe unlocked, or perhaps it was some-

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thing quite trivial which kept nagging at me. I had half a mind to turn back, tired as I was, and reassure myself. Then my bus came along and I piled in with the others.

As usual, I did not get a seat. I clung to the hand-rail and allowed myself to be lurched back and forth against the other passengers. I stood on a man's foot, and said, "Oh, sorry." But he looked away without response, which depressed me. And more and more I was sure I had left something of tremendous importance at the office. *Teedle-um-tum-tum*—the tune was a background to my worry all the way home. I went over in my mind the day's business, for I thought, now, perhaps it was a letter which I should have written.

That morning I had arrived at the office to find Mark Letter vigorously at work. By fits, he would occasionally turn up at eight in the morning, tear open the mail and, by the time I arrived, have despatched perhaps half a dozen unnecessary telegrams; and before I could get my coat off, he would deliver a whole day's instructions to me, rapidly fluttering his freckled hands in time with his chattering mouth. This habit used to jar me, and I found only one thing amusing about it—when he would say, as he gave instructions for dealing with each item, "Mark letter urgent." I thought that rather funny coming from a man named Mark Letter, and I often thought of him, in one of those moods, as Mr. Mark Letter Urgent.

Now, as I swayed in the bus, I recalled that morning's excess of energy on the part of Mark Letter Urgent. He had been more urgent than usual, so that I was still annoyed by his urgency. I felt terribly old for my twenty-two years as I raked round in my mind for some clue as to what I had left undone. And the farther the bus carried me from the office, the more certain I became of it. Not that I took my job to heart very seriously, but Mr. Letter's moods of bustle were infectious, and when they occurred I felt fussy for the rest of the day; and although I consoled myself that I would feel better when I got home, the anxiety would not leave me.

By noon, Mr. Letter had calmed down a little, and for an hour before I went to lunch he strode round the office with his hands in his pockets, whistling between his seedy, brown teeth *The Girl I Left Behind Me.* I lurched with the bus as it chugged out the rhythm—*Teedle-um-tum-tum, teedle-um* . . . Returning from lunch I had found silence, and wondered if Mr. Letter was out, until I heard suddenly, from his tiny private office, the same tune again, a low swift hum, trailing out toward the end. Then I knew that he had fallen into one of his afternoon daydreams.

I would sometimes come upon him in his little box of an office when these trances afflicted him. I would find him sitting in the swivel chair behind his desk. Usually he had taken off his shirt-collar and

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slung it across the back of his chair. His right elbow would be propped on the desk, supporting his chin, while from his left hand would dangle his tie. He would be gazing at this tie—the main object of his contemplation. That afternoon I had found him tie-gazing when I went into his room for some papers. He was staring at it with parted lips so that I could see his small, separated, discolored teeth, no larger than a child's first teeth. Through them came his favorite tune—*Teedle-um-tum-tum* . . .

I got off the bus at my usual stop, with my pennies still in my hand. I almost threw them away, absent-mindedly thinking they were the ticket, and when I noticed them I thought how nearly no one at all I was, since even the conductor, in his rush, had passed me by.

Mark Letter had remained in his dream for two and a half hours. What was it I had left unfinished? For the life of me I could not recall what he had said when at last he emerged from his office. Perhaps it was then I had made tea. Mr. Letter always liked a cup when he was neither in his frenzy nor his abstraction, but ordinary and talkative. He would speak of his hobby, which was fretwork. I do not think Mr. Letter had any home life. At forty-six he was still unmarried, living alone in a house at Roehampton. As I walked up the lane to my lodgings I remembered how Mr. Letter had come in for his tea with his tie still dangling from his hand, his throat white and collarless, and the inevitable *Teedle-um-tum-tum* in his teeth.

At last I was home with my key in the lock. Softly, I said to myself, softly turn the key, and thank God I'm home. My landlady passed through the hall from kitchen to dining room with a salt and pepper cruet in her crinkly hands. She had some new lodgers. "My guests," she called them. The new guests always took precedence over the old with my landlady.

I felt desolate. I simply could not climb the stairs to my room to wash, and then descend to take brown soup with the new guests while my landlady fussed over them, ignoring me. I sat for a moment in the chair in the hall to collect my strength. A year's illness drains one, however young. Suddenly the thought of the brown soup and the anxiety about the office made me decide. I would not go upstairs to my room. I would return to the office and see what it was that I had overlooked.

Teedle-um-tum-tum—I told myself that I was giving way to neurosis. Many times I had laughed at my sister who, after she had gone to bed at night, would send her husband downstairs to make sure all the gas taps were turned off, all the doors locked, back and front. Very well, I was just as silly as my sister, but now I understood her panic and simply opened the door and slipped out of the house. Exhausted as I was,

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I made my way back to the bus stop, back to the office.

"Why should I do this for Mark Letter?" I demanded of myself. But I realized that I was not returning for his sake; it was for my own. I was doing this to get rid of the feeling of incompletion, to wipe out the song in my brain that was swimming around like a damned goldfish.

As the bus took me back along the familiar route, I wondered what I should say if Mark Letter were still in the office. He often worked late, or at least, stayed there late, doing I don't know what, for his screw and nail business did not call for long hours. It seemed to me he had an affection for those dingy premises. I was rather apprehensive that I would find Mr. Letter standing just as I had last seen him, swinging his tie in his hand, beside my desk. I resolved that if I should find him there I would say straight out that I had come to get something left behind me.

A clock struck quarter past seven as I got off the bus. I realized that once again I had not paid my fare. I looked at the pennies in my hand for a stupid second. Then I felt reckless. *Teedle-um-tum-tum*—I caught myself humming the tune as I walked quickly up the sad sidestreet to our office.

My heart knocked at my throat. Softly, softly, I said to myself as I turned the key of the outside door. Quickly, quickly, I ran up the stairs. Only outside the office door I halted, and while I found the office key on my bunch it occurred to me how queerly my sister would think I was behaving.

I opened the door and my sadness left me at once. With a strange joy I recognized what it was I had left behind me—my own body lying strangled on the floor. I ran toward my body and embraced it like a lover.

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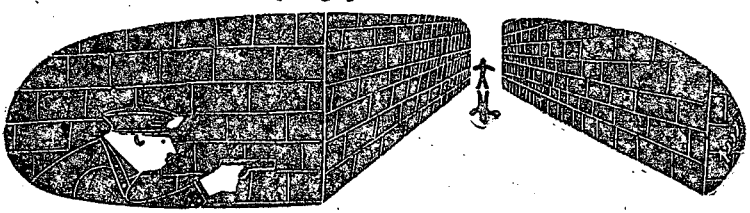

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We consider it a "scoop" to be able to offer you the newest Charles B. Child story about Inspector Chafik of the Baghdad police—a story that has never been published before . . . At the time of this writing, Mr. Child has 31 tales of Inspector Chafik to his credit. May we humbly suggest another "scoop"? Why doesn't a publisher with a fine mystery list select a group of Inspector Chafik stories and give them to Mr. Child's large public in book form? Such a collection deserves the permanence of cloth, the continuity of 25-cent reprint, and an appreciative Introduction. Since the Inspector Chafik tales were born in "Collier's," the honor of writing the Introduction should fall to one of the editors of "Collier's"; but if this is no longer feasible, Your Humble Servants would deem it a privilege to be asked . . .

A title for the proposed book? Perhaps you have noticed that among the titles of the Chafik short stories one word keeps breaking through, catching the eye, like a scarlet thread in the weave of a design. The word is "Death"—as in "Death Was a Wedding Guest"—"Death Had Strange Hands"—"Death in the Fourth Dimension"—"Death Starts a Rumor"—"Death Was a Tempter"—"Death Had a Birthday." Logically, then, "Death" should be the key word in any title chosen for a volume of Chafik shorts . . . OF DEATH AND INSPECTOR CHAFIK . . . THE NINE DEATHS OF INSPECTOR CHAFIK . . . DEATH TAKES NO HOLIDAY . . . *although we hasten to remind you that when Inspector Chafik investigates death, justice takes no holiday either . . .*

A TIME TO MOURN

by CHARLES B. CHILD

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT, FOR EIGHT nights now, the fitful thunder of drums had menaced the mean streets of Kadhimain, a suburb of Baghdad. It was the time of *Moharrem*—a time to mourn and a time to hate. The procession of men that circled the great mosque chanted in funeral-edged voices, and the flames of torches etched their fanatical faces as they re-enacted a tragedy of bygone days.

Moharrem was a festival of creed rather than faith, of schism in the

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Moslem world, dating from the fratricidal War of Succession that followed the death of the Prophet Mohammed. The Prophet's son-in-law was assassinated and his two grandsons were slain in battle. Thereafter, followers of this blood line, who called themselves *Shiahs,* annually celebrated their ancient grief and fanned the embers of their ancient hate.

So now a pageant of floats passed in the plaza outside the shrine of Kadhimain, which stood aloof from the squalor of the quarter, the shrine's golden domes and towers lifted to the serenity of the desert sky. On high biers, covered with sheets henna-stained to simulate blood, were borne the "corpses" of the illustrious dead, played by the living with shocking realism. Each bier was carried by four bearers and heralded by a linkman who held a crown of flaming rags on a long pole. The torches threw long flickering shadows and a murky glow hung over the somber scene.

The keening of the mourners was the moan of wind and their venom the shriek of wind, for madness sparked in the men massed along the edges of the plaza, and in the women who watched from the rooftops.

Not far from the gate of the mosque stood a little man who was neither celebrant nor spectator. He was neatly dressed in Western clothes and on his head was the black *sidarah* of the modern Iraqi. Occasionally, a torch withdrew the shadows from his thin dark face and his drab eyes took color from the flame. From his rather full lips dangled a cigarette at a dejected angle and he sometimes spoke to a police sergeant at his side.

"One regrets the necessity for so many corpses," he said.

The sergeant, whose dour face was carved mahogany, answered, "Sir, but these are living corpses—"

"To point a gun in play is a foolish act, and it is equally foolhardy for the living to point their toes in pretense of death. I repeat, my dear Abdullah, this disturbs me. God is not here. There is nothing holy about hatred."

Inspector Chafik of the Baghdad police shrugged unhappily. He was a deeply devout man, but he had had the experience of many *Moharrems* and knew that a spark of madness could ignite a conflagration.

He watched another float emerge from a covered bazaar street into the plaza. As it passed through the gate into the courtyard of the shrine, a fanatic began to flagellate himself and the Inspector gave a signal for the man to be removed. This was the last night of *Moharrem* and tension had mounted during the week.

There was a gap in the cortège of biers and the poorly lighted plaza was almost in darkness; the Inspector and his companion waited uneasily. At length the glow of another torch was seen through the archway of the roofed street.

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"What comes now?" Chafik asked irritably, straining on tiptoes to see.

The Sergeant, who stood head and shoulders above the wall of the crowd, answered, "I think it is the bier of Kasim, Sir."

"Kasim," repeated Chafik, and went on as though quoting from police records: "A companion of the Prophet's grandsons and also slain in battle. This Kasim died on the day he would have gone to his bride, so here we have a tragedy dear to the hearts of our women. In a moment we shall hear them—" He lifted his eyes to the level of the roofs where the women were black shadows; as their wailing began, Chafik covered his ears.

The smoky torch, just within the archway, spat a shower of sparks, then went out, plunging the covered street into darkness. Bedlam broke in the plaza and from the rooftops above.

Suddenly, piercing the hubbub, there was a cry in different key. Shrill, brief and appalling, mortal.

It came from where the bier of Kasim was blocked by the surge of the crowd and it was followed by strident police whistles.

Inspector Chafik said, "As flies to carrion, so people to the scene of an accident." He allied the authority of his voice with Abdullah's elbows and found safe passage behind the Sergeant's broad back.

They came to the archway and the halted bier. The shrouded man, who played the part of Kasim, lay with his knees drawn up and his body contorted.

"What happened?" Chafik asked.

One answered, "He cried out like a soul flung to the Fires of Hell!"

"Bring light!"

Police flashes illumined the scene and the Inspector made a rapid examination. Then he said to Sergeant Abdullah, "This one plays the role of a corpse too well. He is as dead as the bridegroom he portrays."

Abdullah's dour face expressed horror. "Could it perchance be the decisive effect of excitement on a weak heart?" he asked.

Chafik smiled fleetingly at his assistant's love of long words. "Excitement was incisive," he said drily. "Look, and tell me what you see."

The Sergeant bent over the bier. When he straightened, he said with professional detachment, "I observe the incision. A pointed object, possibly a dagger, has been twice thrust into the left breast—"

"And so the corpse died!" said the little Inspector. "How very macabre!" Chafik carefully lit a cigarette.

The police cordoned off the area and restored order. But beyond the lines the mob ruled the streets. Chafik significantly flicked a forefinger across his throat. "All that is needed is a rumor that this man was killed by one of another faith or sect," he announced.

He looked about for the missing

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weapon and then told Abdullah to continue the search. A police officer identified the dead man as a neighborhood youth named Ahmed Murad, who had been given the role of the tragic bridegroom because of his good looks.

"Fate was challenged by this Ahmed who played Kasim," said the officer in a somber voice.

"Why do you say 'challenged'?" Chafik asked sharply. He bent to pick up a crumpled piece of cloth that lay near the bier.

"Because Ahmed, like the bridegroom he played, was to have married at the end of the Festival—"

"So? Then you wish me—a policeman—to believe this poor young man was destroyed by an act of Fate, because he, too, was a potential bridegroom?"

"It is an odd coincidence," persisted the officer.

Chafik said impatiently, "Coincidence is the inevitable crossing of one thread with another, a tangle caused by carelessness or a mischievous kitten. Nevertheless, your information is interesting . . . Was Ahmed's pending marriage agreeable to both parties?"

"It was arranged between the families, Sir. Therefore the question of the young people's feelings does not arise."

"How justly you reproach me! I, too, am a father and must one day arrange my son's marriage."

Chafik smiled as he thought of his son, of tender years but already skilled in the art of having his own way. "The boot is on my son Faisal's foot, not mine," muttered the little man. He looked down at the strip of cloth he had picked up and was absent-mindedly winding around his arm; he saw damp patches, exclaimed with disgust, and unwound it.

"Blood! How Ahmed bled! The hand that held the knife must carry the mark of Cain!"

He continued to examine the fabric. It was rich silk, about three feet long and ten inches wide. The stain was heavy at one end and repeated at intervals, becoming progressively lighter; it suggested that the cloth had been folded and the blood had soaked through.

"Odd!" said Chafik. "It resembles a muffler. Or does it? And is it fashionable to wear a muffler with a shroud?" He put it away for later examination. A more urgent matter needed attention.

He said to the waiting officer, "That torch carried in front of the bier. It went out very conveniently. Find me the man who held it—his evidence at least may be illuminating."

When the policeman had left, the Inspector turned to the bearers of the bier, four men of the porter class who awaited questioning. He asked them what they had seen.

The head porter replied, "We saw nothing but a shadow."

"Had it shape? Were the clothes Western or tribal?"

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"I thought it was robed, but perhaps I was wrong. And there was a voice, a whisper—'Ahmed, go now to your bride!'"

"Surely you mean Kasim?" suggested Chafik.

"The voice said 'Ahmed,'" insisted the porter.

"What kind of voice?"

"It was a whisper, husky—I cannot tell you more." The witness hesitated, then added, "But there was perfume—yes, a very pleasant perfume, like a cool flowered garden on Tigris bank. I can smell it now—" He sniffed appreciatively.

Chafik, who held a handkerchief sprinkled with orange-water to counteract the evil odors of the street, guiltily put it away. Perfume was no clue to sex among his people. "So many of us carry a nosegay because of lack of drains," he said in the hollow voice of self-talk and hearing himself, was embarrassed; thinking aloud when under strain was an incurable habit.

The roar of the mob surged in his ears and he saw the police lines bending, almost breaking, under pressure. Then he saw Sergeant Abdullah hurry to plug a gap with his bulk. Tension was approaching crisis and Chafik grimly told himself he must solve the crime in a few hours, or there would be a monstrous riot.

They brought him a new witness, a surly man who had the bloodshot eyes of a drunkard. His breath smelled of *arak* when he shouted, "A fine thing when I'm snatched from my devotions on *Moharrem* night!"

The policeman who was escort said to Chafik, "Sir, I found him devoting himself to a bottle in a doorway. He is the individual who was hired to carry the torch before Kasim and who let it go out."

"This cop lies!" spat the torchbearer. "I didn't let the *mash-al* go out because I wasn't carrying it!" He wove on unsteady feet, wagged a forefinger, and added with the cunning of an alcoholic, "You'll have to pay me if you want to know who did!"

Chafik said softly, "The payment I make is with stripes. Permit me to offer you this *baksheesh* as proof of my generosity." He rose on tiptoes and struck with small, well-tended hands that lashed like steel whips. "Do you remember now who carried the torch?" he asked in the same soft voice.

The man groveled. "Master! I gave it to Hussain Talat. I—"

"Why did you delegate your duty to this Hussain?"

"He is a religionist, Master. He wished to gain merit by walking with the torch. I was touched by his request—"

"And by his bribe!" Chafik said with disgust. "Isn't Hussain Talat an elderly man?" he asked the policeman.

"Yes, Sir. He lives in the Street of the Seventh Imam, not far from here. A much respected man, and

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also pious, as this animal says, and—"

A gesture commanded silence. The Inspector reached into the card index of his brain where the dossiers of so many citizens were filed. "Ah, here it is!" he announced in the hollow voice. "Talat, named Hussain. Age, sixty-five. Childless. A wife who died in 1941. Married again in 1953 . . . Married to—married to—" He rapped his forehead and exclaimed, "What a wretched memory! Is she named Kamin or Kamariya? I do know she's forty, no longer young, but attractive—"

He remembered his wife, the very attractive Leila to whom he had been married for twenty-two years, and reproved himself: "Chafik J. Chafik! Have you, then, arrived at the age when a man seeks youth at the lips of an adolescent, a thirty-year-old?"

He saw the police officer gaping at him, and snapped, "When the mouth is open, evil spirits go in—also flies!"

The man flushed and the little Inspector patted his shoulder. "What more can you tell me?"

"There is a rumor about Hussain and his wife, Sir, and—"

"Rumor is an assassin, its tongue a poisoned dagger . . . What is the rumor?" Chafik demanded.

"It is said Hussain Talat's wife pulls him around by the nose, that there are young men who—well, her husband is old and she—"

"You mean she entertains lovers behind the dotard's back?"

The officer nodded and looked meaningly at the body on the bier.

"Ahmed Murad was one of them?" Chafik prompted again.

"Her favorite, according to rumor, Sir—"

The Inspector pursed his expressive mouth. An ordinary story, ugly and pitiful, and he was moved to say, "Why didn't the old fool kill his wife instead? That he was entitled to do if she was faithless." He went over the facts and wove them into a pattern, but there were loose threads and he could not be content with shoddy work.

The voice of the mob penetrated his thinking. It rose to a new crescendo, sparked to fury by new incident. The harassed police were forced to use the butts of their carbines to hold the line. Chafik came up as Sergeant Abdullah struggled out of the crowd, half carrying and half dragging the limp body of a young man.

"They were going to lynch him!" Abdullah announced.

"What had he done to drive them so crazy?"

"He was trying to hide this, Sir!"

The Sergeant showed the Inspector a bloody knife.

It had a thin, sharp, concentric blade attached to a silver haft which was inlaid with black enamel. The stains on it were hardly dry. Such a weapon had killed Ahmed Murad.

"The experts will decide," said Chafik.

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He fumbled with an unlighted cigarette and studied the unconscious figure held by the massive Abdullah. "What is his name?"

"They tell me he is Mohammed Latif—"

Another handsome youth, the Inspector thought, but Ahmed is less handsome in death. And this one is younger—he has a fledgling's down on his lip . . . "There are too many young men in this case," grumbled Chafik. "Perhaps this one, too, knows the wife of Hussain Talat who is so generous to handsome young men. Hm! He wears perfume."

"It is not an uncommon habit," the Sergeant said discreetly.

"Abdullah, *I* have a reason! *I* have sniffed too many vintage corpses! Nevertheless, a perfumed shadow is a thread in this case."

"Yes, Sir. And now if you will examine this individual's hands—"

Chafik looked. The man's right hand was bloody and there were smears on the forearm; his robe, too, was soiled.

Abdullah went on, "Note that the palm carries an imprint in blood shaped like the haft of the dagger I have shown you."

"I note," said Chafik.

"He is Ahmed Murad's murderer!"

The Inspector threw away the unlighted and mangled cigarette. Choosing a fresh one, he said, "Just now, when you were rescuing this young man, I also put my horse to too high a fence."

"Sir?"

"Abdullah, I jumped at a conclusion and fell off. Take this perfumed youth to the station-house and treat him with iodine and bandages. I will question him later. Meantime, I shall call on Hussain Talat, a worthy man, a most respected merchant of this neighborhood . . . And I shall meet The Woman of Babylon," he added thoughtfully.

"Babylon is many miles from Baghdad," protested the Sergeant.

"If you insist on being literal," said Inspector Chafik, "let's say she's The Woman of Baghdad." He blew gently on the smouldering end of his cigarette to make it burn evenly, and went away.

Chafik found the address he was looking for, a house near the river bank. A date palm towered in the courtyard and there was a pleasant odor of night-blooming flowers. It was a quiet neighborhood.

A light satisfied the Inspector that somebody was in, but there was no response to his knock. He called out, "Is Hussain Talat there?" and was aware that he was watched from behind a small iron grill set at eye level in the heavy door.

Then a woman answered softly, "My husband is not at home."

"I regret disturbing you," he said, making a little bow to the door. "Nevertheless, I must see your husband. I am the police, Madame."

There was silence, then the woman asked in a strained voice,

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"Why? Has Hussain done anything?"

"Done?" Chafik evaded the answer.

"He was in such a temper when he left. I was afraid—" There was the sound of bolts withdrawn and the door opened. Madame Talat stood in the shadows, a slender woman, her face discreetly covered by the folds of her head-shawl. "We can talk better without the neighbors," she invited, and led him to a room at the top of a bare stone stairway.

He was bewildered by the rich furnishings, after the shabby entrance. In this ordinary house were heaped treasures that belonged to the days of Baghdad's splendor. Crystal chandeliers hung from the gilded ceiling and the rug on the floor was a masterpiece. Chafik looked curiously at the woman who stood proudly among her possessions.

"You like it?" she asked, stroking the brocade of a chair.

"An exquisite setting for you, Madame."

Hussain Talat's wife threw back her head-shawl and rewarded him with a slow smile. Her neck was long and slender and firm, her cheeks bloomed, and her soft mouth was inviting; the years had forgotten her. She stood looking at him from the corners of her long eyes, and he was reminded of that other lady of Baghdad, the fabled Scheherazade who had captivated a Caliph with her wiles.

Chafik said sternly, "Kindly veil yourself," and turned away.

In the mirror he saw the smile fade and a frown of uncertainty crease the smooth brow. He understood when her hands darted to her face to smooth invisible lines, and was moved to pity for this woman who lived for her beauty and feared its passing. "You do not like to look at me?" she asked like a hurt child.

"On the contrary, Madame, I like too much! That is why I asked you to veil yourself."

The woman sighed with pleasure and took the bait. "It is true I am very attractive to men, especially young men," she said. "They *will* pay me court."

"And your husband is old," Chafik broke in sympathetically.

"You are a very understanding policeman!"

He made his little bow and looked away to conceal distaste. There was tarnish on this woman, and there was tarnish in this room; he saw the dust that lay over all the beauty, and thought, *She spends more time on herself and her young men than on her home . . .* He asked brusquely, "Do you know Ahmed Murad?"

Alarm flickered in the long eyes, and then anger. "A most persistent young man! I told him I would not see him again. Hussain was very angry—we quarreled about Ahmed before he went out—" Her voice faltered. "What—what has my husband done?" she asked fearfully.

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"He let the torch go out."

"Torch? He carried a torch in the procession?"

"To light the bier of Kasim. Ahmed played the part—did you know that?" asked Chafik.

"Of course. And Hussain let the torch go out? Why should he?" She frowned, then said, "Ah, yes, it would hurt Ahmed, disgrace him."

The Inspector said, "I do not understand."

"Surely it would disgrace him to go unlighted into the mosque?"

Chafik fiddled with the ring he wore on the small finger of his left hand, and his eyes took color from the stone.

"How it would hurt that vain young man not to be seen by his audience," Madame Talat went on, "and by that chit, his future wife, who surely was watching from a rooftop." Her voice rose and she clasped her hands. "Just for this little trick you come for my husband?" she said angrily.

"Such a subtle trick," the Inspector said softly.

He stood with his back to the woman and, with a fingertip, brushed the edge of a rosewood bureau; the dust was thick. His sense of tidiness was offended and he began to straighten the bric-a-brac that had been pushed aside. Then he stopped; down the center of the bureau-top there was a long dustless strip. His eye measured it.

"Do you know a Mohammed Latif?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Mohammed—? Yes, I know him," she said, puzzled.

"A perfumed stripling," said Inspector Chafik, and added, "Is he easily roused to jealousy?"

"Like a child . . . But why do you ask? What are you keeping from me?"

He turned on her, his swarthy face a mask. "Ahmed Murad was murdered tonight!" he said brutally. "We found a bloody knife in the hand of Mohammed Latif, Madame!" The woman's scream was merely an offense to his ears; all at once he found the odor of the room of littered memories very stale, and he took out his scented handkerchief and buried his nose.

There was the sound of heavy feet stumbling up the stairs. The door opened and a man came in, breathing hard as after running. He was a small thin man, but his robe and turban gave dignity to his unimposing body. Weak and faded eyes peered through thick lenses. His mouth was sensitive, almost ascetic.

The woman cried, "Husband, oh, husband!" and Hussain Talat went to her and cradled her in his arms.

"I do not have to be told who *you* are!" he rasped at Chafik.

"My visits are rarely social, Mr. Talat."

"Why have you troubled my wife?" There was an inflection of fear in the old man's voice. He held the woman close and crooned as to a child, "Kamariya! My Kamariya! What did he tell you?"

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She shrugged away his arms. Shock had passed and she settled quietly among the cushions on a divan. "He told me about Ahmed, and he told me about the torch you carried. Why did you let it go out, husband? Is it true you did it to disgrace Ahmed—because—because you were jealous?" Madame Talat finished in lowered voice.

Her husband did not answer; he clasped his hands so tightly that his knuckles whitened.

The long eyes held his anxiously, as she hurried on, "And did you know Mohammed Latif was nearby? That he had a knife—that—"

Chafik broke in angrily, "Enough, Madame! Are you trying to warn him? Why?"

The old man stood protectively in front of the woman. "Do not browbeat her!" he said fiercely. "She knows nothing—nothing at all. There is no need to torture her. I will not have her questioned!" Anger passed and he said quietly, "You came for me. I will go with you."

Inspector Chafik nodded. As they went out, he looked back at the room cluttered with treasures—the gifts of a man who denied his wife nothing. It was shocking, this misalliance of a gentle old man and The Woman of Baghdad whom he sheltered with misplaced tenderness.

Hussain Talat would be difficult to interrogate.

The sound of the *Moharrem* drums was like the roar of the distant sea, and the Inspector felt pressure as he conducted the inquiry in temporary headquarters set up in a nearby police post. He sat at a table blotched with inkspots and scarred by cigarettes, and complained because the chair creaked. "So the gallows creak when heavy with fruit," he muttered and slowly raised his dun-colored eyes to the old man arraigned before him. Chafik had been at it for half an hour, asking question after question; but none had been answered.

He had asked about Ahmed Murad, about Mohammed Latif; he had needled Hussain Talat with innuendoes about his wife and her being courted by young men. Only when Latif was mentioned, did the old man show any emotion.

"A harmless youth," he protested.

"Harmless?" shouted Chafik. "We take him bloody-handed, trying to hide the murder weapon, and you call him harmless!"

"A mere boy," Hussain said with agitation.

"Are you afraid of the truth coming out?" the Inspector demanded.

The old man did not answer, and Chafik took time to light a cigarette; the pyramid of butts in the ashtray testified to the strain of the interview. He thought of a tool to break the deadlock, but hated to use it. He said to himself, *Chafik I. Chafik! Your profession is a detestable one!* . . . He looked around and his *jinn,* Abdullah, materialized from a shadowed corner.

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Reluctantly, Chafik told him, "Bring the prisoner," then added heavily, "and the exhibits."

Abdullah went out and returned with Mohammed Latif, handcuffed. He also put a flat box on the table. The Inspector opened it and looked at the knife and the bloodstained cloth found near the bier. "What about fingerprints?" he asked his assistant.

"Sir, there were only the prisoner's on it."

Chafik looked at the prisoner. The youth's head was bandaged and his eyes were wide with terror; he babbled incoherently.

"A pretty pet, isn't he?" the Inspector said casually to Hussain Talat who sat on the edge of the bench, hands gripped between his knees. "Confidentially, I don't know what a woman could possibly see in him."

He turned to Mohammed Latif and shouted, "Well, why did you do it?"

"I did nothing! Nothing!"

"We found you with blood on your hands—"

"I didn't shed it! I—"

"You were hiding a knife!"

Mohammed Latif cried, "The Compassionate One be my witness! I walked in the procession. I was behind the bier. The torch went out. There was a terrible cry. Somebody pushed by me and dropped something. I—I picked it up—then—"

"You're almost convincing," jeered Chafik.

"You don't believe me!" Tears began to run down the youth's face. "There were shouts that a man had been killed. I saw I was holding a knife. The blood! I was frightened. I—I had to hide it—someone saw—then—"

"Sergeant Abdullah saved you from being lynched," Chafik finished. "We'll give you a cleaner end," he added and flicked another glance at Hussain Talat.

The old man was looking at him with horror and loathing. In the background, Abdullah intruded a disapproving cough. The Inspector turned angrily on them.

"You don't like the way I talk? Then listen to that mob out there on the streets! If I don't solve this case now, there'll be a hundred deaths in Baghdad before morning!"

Suddenly he reached into the box Abdullah had brought and took out the knife. "Exhibit A." He flicked it so that it slid toward Hussain Talat. "And here's another item," went on Chafik. He shook out the strip of bloodstained silk and spread it carefully down the center of the table. "It plays a part in Ahmed's death," he announced, "an important part."

He turned to the prisoner and the young man froze as a rabbit to a snake; and with the suddenness of a snake, Chafik struck.

"You killed Ahmed because of the wife of this old man here!" he said roughly. "You were jealous be-

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cause Ahmed was her favorite and when the torch went out, you took the chance and stuck the knife in him. Isn't that right? Answer me!"

The youth wagged his head helplessly.

"Talk! Confess! Confession is essential to our law—and also cleansing for the soul." But Latif was incapable of speech and the Inspector muttered, "Take him away!" Abdullah supported the youth from the room.

Chafik's eyes were as dead as the deserts of the land of his birth and he appeared to take no interest in Hussain Talat who stood looking at the exhibits. When the old man raised his head, he too had dead eyes.

"Permit me to go," he said in a flat voice and did not wait for the answer.

He crossed the room with a stiff walk paced to the funeral beat of the *Moharrem* drums. In the doorway he brushed by Sergeant Abdullah. The Inspector signaled to let the old man pass.

When he had gone Chafik said with the voice of humility, "I dare not ask the Compassionate One's forgiveness. I just racked two men, Abdullah—one an old man and one a stripling."

"It is true you hectored the youth, Sir, but he is guilty—"

"As innocent as you or I!"

"Sir?" The dour Sergeant's jaw sagged.

"A perfumed herring dragged across the trail, first by chance and then by me! I said coincidence is a mischievous kitten. Yet what more natural for the youth to walk near the bier and torture himself with his rival's hour of honor. The young in love like to suffer."

He went on. "A clean hand, not that young man's bloody one, is the sign of the killer. Watch, Abdullah." Inspector Chafik picked up the strip of silk and wound it around his hand and arm, so that the heaviest stain showed on the palm. Then he took the knife. "You see how it was? The knife was dropped, the cloth discarded, and the killer went away *clean*."

Abdullah looked horrified. "Sir! Hussain Talat has clean hands!"

"So have others in Baghdad!" Inspector Chafik's voice was grim. "Come, Abdullah. New blood must not be added to old."

They detoured the area of the mosque where riot mobs were still in control. Near the Street of the Seventh Imam they caught up with Hussain Talat who was moving slowly, burdened by more than his years. Chafik checked Abdullah and they watched the old man begin the last stretch of the way to Golgotha.

He talked to himself and his voice echoed back from the high walls without meaning. As he neared the house, the voice grew louder, and then suddenly he was running with hands outstretched, his shadow leaping before him.

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When he reached the door he was exhausted and leaned against it.

Sergeant Abdullah would have gone to his assistance but Chafik stopped him. Dragging weighted feet, Hussain Talat climbed the stairs.

They gave him a moment, then followed. The door was ajar and they heard the woman cry, "Husband, why do you look at me? What is it?"

"I saw the knife—the Persian knife I gave you. I saw it!"

"Husband!"

"There is fear in you! Evil in you! You put the knife in the hand of Mohammed. You told him I would let the torch go out—you told him to kill—"

"Madness!" the woman screamed.

"You asked me in your wheedling way to carry the torch, to let it go out as the bier of Kasim emerged into the plaza. You said you hated Ahmed and wished to shame him. Truth was, you wished him dead because he was marrying, because he had finished with you. You think I do not know about your young men! In my dotage I became your slave. And so one man is dead—and another, a boy, goes to the gallows! But he shall not!" Hussain Talat's voice rose to a shriek.

Through the crack in the door Chafik and Abdullah saw the old man stoop over the woman on the divan; he took her by the throat. Once again the Inspector held back Abdullah. "Not yet," he said softly.

"That boy shall not die—I will kill you first—and myself—and I'll leave a confession that I killed Ahmed as any cheated husband would. But that boy will not die! He won't be another of your victims! No, no more—no!"

Choking sounds came from the woman. She fought the old man and loosened his grip. "Husband," she gasped, "I did not send Mohammed. I followed you—*I* killed Ahmed—*I*. There was madness in me! Husband, save me—oh, save me!"

The men in the doorway saw Hussain Talat's hands fall to his sides.

Inspector Chafik went in. "It is too late, Madame," he said quietly. "You have confessed."

He turned to the stunned old man and said humbly, "How can I ask your pardon? I had to use you, and that poor young man I tortured, to wring from this woman the confession required by our law. The evidence I had was too circumstantial. The knife did not have her fingerprints. And this is why—"

He took from his pocket the strip of bloodstained silk. He arranged it on the dustless strip down the center of the bureau-top. It fitted exactly.

The woman sprang up, screaming, "You devil! You devil!" Sergeant Abdullah seized her. "Husband! Husband, help me," she whimpered. "Pity me. You have never let harm come to me—save me, pity me!"

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He turned his back and said to Chafik:

"So you knew?"

"I knew it was not Mohammed, for his hands were bloody. I knew it was not you—for why should a husband kill a lover who is finished with the wife? I knew it could only be a woman who would cry as the blow was struck, 'Ahmed, go now to your bride.' A woman rejected by her lover and insanely jealous. A woman afraid of mounting years and fading beauty—"

"An evil woman," Hussain Talat said bitterly.

"Call her The Woman of Baghdad," said Chafik.

He went to the window and, throwing wide the shutters, looked up at the sky, rose-petaled with the dawn. *Moharrem* was nearly over, but the mob still growled in the distance.

"A Roman mob." Inspector Chafik shrugged. "They will be content when I tell them I have a victim to throw to the lions of justice."

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

Next Month	a new STUART PALMER story Hildegarde Withers on the Groucho Marx Show
June issue	a new CHARLOTTE ARMSTRONG story
July issue	a new ELLERY QUEEN story
August issue	a new HUGH PENTECOST story
September issue	a new STANLEY ELLIN story
October issue	a new RUFUS KING story

Also watch for new stories by JOHN COLLIER, ANDREW GARVE, ROBERT BLOCH, DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS, CLIFFORD KNIGHT *and* MICHAEL GILBERT

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **MICHAEL GILBERT**

TITLE: ***If You Know How***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Bohun

LOCALE: Commuters' train from London

COMMENTS: *Four tired businessmen,*
in first-class privacy;
Murder in the tunnel
— and then there were three.

NORMALLY BOHUN HAD NO PROBlem at all about getting home from work. His office was in New Square, Lincoln's Inn, and his flat was off Chancery Lane. That summer, however, he had been lent a pretty little bungalow near Farningham. It was undoubtedly nice to get away from the thrice-used air of central London, and to see roses growing on bushes instead of in barrows; but it did sometimes occur to him to wonder whether it was worth all the bother.

His terminus was Victoria. It offered him a choice of three trains home: the 6:16 which was a little early and invariably jam-packed; the 7:16 which was a little late and carried only a moderate number of passengers; and the 8:16 which was almost empty but much too late.

For some weeks now he had been compromising haste with comfort by catching the 7:16. His first-class season ticket entitled him to a degree of elbow room and his normal traveling companions were three in number.

Number One: a middle-aged man with whitish hair and a bright red face — his name, Bohun gathered, was Conyers.

Number Two: a tall, depressed-looking man, name unknown, who spoke little, invariably called Conyers "sir," and was in some way dependent on him. Not in the same office, Bohun guessed, but in the same general line of business.

Number Three: a hard, brisk, cheerful man who always smoked a pipe, talked constantly, and called Conyers "Mr. Conyers" — and, Bo-

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hun was sure, disliked him heartily; and who, in turn, was called "Sam" by Number Two, the tall unhappy man. Number Three's second name was probably Blessingham — inferred by Bohun from having once spotted that name on the label of a suitcase Number Three was carrying. The inference was confirmed by the fact that the brisk, pipe-smoking man's brief case had the initials *S.B.* on it.

Bohun sometimes speculated about the three men — about their homes of which he knew little, except that they all got out at different stations along the line; about their businesses, of which a certain amount did seep out from their talk. Conyers was managing director of a large group of magazines; the tall man had something to do with advertising — which would account for his servility towards Conyers, since Conyers evidently placed considerable advertising for his magazines; and Sam, the pipe-smoker, was a senior executive on the printing side — whether directly under Conyers or not, it was hard to say.

More intriguing, perhaps, were Bohun's glimpses of their backgrounds, as revealed by their daily reading. Conyers: *The Financial Times*. Tall, dejected man: *Home Gardening* and — during the newspaper strike — *The Three Musketeers*. Sam: *Daily Mirror* and *Printing Trades Gazette*. In the evening they all read newspapers — the *London Evening Standard*.

It was a fact, however, that although Bohun could no more help observing than he could stop breathing, his interest in his fellow passengers was only casual until the day he saw Conyers die.

He was forced to recall the events of that particular evening for the benefit of his friend, Superintendent Hazlerigg, and Bohun's excellent visual memory supplied him, after a short period of concentration, with all the necessary details.

"I got to Victoria," he recalled, "just behind Conyers. I've done that before — in fact, we sometimes catch the same bus, a No. 11, which he picks up on Fleet Street and I catch at Temple Bar. Conyers bought his evening paper, as I've often seen him do, from the man with the pitch under the clock. We reached our first-class carriage at about the same time. The tall chap — what did you say his name was? Ruddock — he was already there. Sam Blessingham came along almost immediately afterward. There were quite a few people on the train but we had the four corner seats and no one else butted in."

"Exactly where were the four of you sitting?"

"I was directly opposite Conyers. He had his back to the engine and I was facing it — on the outer side. Blessingham was on the same side as me, with Ruddock opposite him — on the corridor side. The seats between us were empty."

"Any talk?"

"We don't talk much on the way home. Just four tired businessmen, browsing through their *Evening Stand-*

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ards. Incidentally, my eye for detail told me we'd all got different editions. Ruddock had a Midday one. Blessingham had the lunch edition — I could see the list of "Runners and Jockeys" on the back page. I had one that I'd bought earlier to read with my tea. It was like the one Conyers had bought in the station, labeled "Final Night Extra," but his, I noticed, was a later version than mine. His had the most tantalizing pair of legs — I saw them sticking up in the air —"

"*Legs?*"

"A drawing of a very beautiful and appealing pair of feminine legs. Advertising, I suppose — Messrs. Somebody-or-Other's fully-fashioned nylon stockings. I couldn't see the top of it — the paper was folded. That's why I saw the legs upside down."

"They seem to have made quite an impression on you."

"You may sneer," said Bohun, "but they were works of art. I searched for them in my edition. But alas, I could find no sign of them."

"Suppose you get on with the story," said Hazlerigg, impatiently.

"Well, a few minutes later we ran into the tunnel. There's no lighting in those carriages, so we sat in darkness. It lasts about half a minute. By the time we came out again, poor old Conyers was either dying or dead. He sat rigid in his seat, face white, lips blue — the obvious symptoms of a violent heart attack. Luckily we were running up to a station. I pulled the emergency cord, and the rest you know."

"Yes," said Hazlerigg, "the rest I know. You say you were sitting directly opposite Conyers?"

"Our knees were almost touching."

"If either of the others had moved up to him would you have felt them?"

Bohun considered.

"Yes, I am almost certain that I should," he said. "It's just possible — just barely possible — that Ruddock might have moved along their seat, in the darkness, and back again, without my knowing. But Blessingham couldn't possibly have done so. Why?"

"The autopsy," said Hazlerigg, "confirms that Conyers died of heart failure caused by violent shock. I've just been talking to Simcock, who performed the autopsy. He says that Conyers had a bad heart — hence, incidentally, his high color. But it wasn't as bad as all that. Simcock swears that *something* must have happened to set him off — something, perhaps, almost physical. As if some practical joker had pulled his chair away from under him as he was about to sit down, or suddenly produced a luminous hand floating in the air, or touched off a firecracker just behind him — something like that."

"But," said Bohun, blankly, "it's impossible! Or are you implying that Ruddock might have slid along their seat and stuck a pin into him, or given him some kind of violent electric shock?"

"That might have done it. Only it didn't. A pin would have left a puncture. And any sort of violent electric

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shock would have burned him. Conyers's body was absolutely unmarked."

"It's crazy," said Bohun. "And anyway, why?"

"Both men had good reasons for wishing him dead. Conyers was on the point of taking the whole of his group's advertising away from Ruddock. He had formed the opinion that Ruddock was inefficient."

"If Ruddock was the murderer," said Bohun, "there was nothing inefficient about his performance."

"I agree. Blessingham was head of the group's printing works. He'd had a personal row with Conyers and was on his way out — and he knew it. On the other hand, if something happened to Conyers, he'd probably not lose his job. So his livelihood was at stake."

"There was a bit of personal hate there too," said Bohun. "It was concealed, but you couldn't mistake it . . . Which one was it? And how did he do it?"

"If we knew how, we'd know which one," said Hazlerigg.

Bohun took the mystery home with him that night. He traveled on the 8:16, and had the carriage entirely to himself. In his brief case he had seven different editions of the *Evening Standard*, which his secretary had rounded up for him throughout the day. He spread them all over the empty seats, and pored over them.

The ticket collector looked in at Bromley and said, "Ar. A competition. They give big prizes for 'em."

"There's no prize for this one," said Bohun, gathering up the newspapers.

Since there was no time to waste, he rang Hazlerigg from the Station-master's Office.

"It was Conyers's newspaper," he said. "I knew there was something wrong with it. They change a good many things from edition to edition — *but they never change the advertisements!*"

"Good lord," said Hazlerigg, "I believe you're right."

"If you know how, you know who," said Bohun. "Blessingham is a printer — that makes it him. If you get round to his house quickly, you may still find some evidence."

He heard the end of the story two days later.

"It was Blessingham, all right," said Hazlerigg. "He faked up a copy of the *Standard* with a phony center page — and persuaded the chap at Victoria to sell Conyers that copy. Said it was a joke on a friend. The newspaper vender has identified Blessingham — so we're in the clear."

"And I suppose he exchanged his own paper for the bogus one in the confusion after coming out of the tunnel."

"I guess so — and destroyed the phony. And broke up the form he'd printed it from, in a shed back of his house. Only he forgot that he'd taken a couple of trial pulls and we found one of them. Most of it was genuine — all but the stocking advertisement from an old edition, to fill space, and

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one news item which was entirely the product of Blessingham's malice. *Cashier Held by French Police*, it was headed. I'll let you see it some time — it's rather well done. And nicely timed too. The head cashier of Conyers's group is actually on holiday in France right now. This fake news item says that the French police are holding him and that he's already confessed to 'substantial defalcations which might involve other persons in the group.' Conyers must have reached that item just before the tunnel."

"Yes," said Bohun, thoughtfully. "Not good medicine for a dicky heart. Clever, too. If it came off, it seemed foolproof. If it didn't, it was just a joke in doubtful taste, in very doubtful taste."

Then Bohun added, "I have noticed that there are two sorts of people: those who talk on trains and those who listen. If Blessingham had listened more and talked less, he might have learned from Ruddock that it doesn't always pay to advertise."

NEXT MONTH . . .

STUART PALMER'S	*You Bet Your Life*
	Hildegarde Withers on the Groucho Marx Show
JOHN D. MacDONALD'S	*Who's the Blonde?*
W. CAMPBELL GAULT'S	*Don't Crowd Your Luck*
ARTHUR GORDON'S	*The Mischief-Maker*
CYRIL HARE'S	*The Unluckiest Murderer*
FREDERICK NEBEL'S	*That's Just Too Bad*
THE LOCKRIDGES'	*Nobody Can Ask That*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **ROBERT SHECKLEY**

TITLE: ***Country Caper***

TYPE: Crime Story à la **Black Mask**

CRIMINAL: Madden

LOCALE: Between New York and Chicago

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Madden was at home in big cities where neon signs and street lamps were always lit at night. So Madden distrusted the deep darkness of a country night. But this opportunity was just too good to pass up . . .*

IT WAS CALLED SCOTTY'S DINER, AND it looked like a million other diners—just an anonymous aluminum boxcar set all by itself in a half circle of gravel on the edge of a concrete highway. It looked no worse than the others Madden had passed all day and he could expect to find nothing better ahead. It was sunset, suppertime, so he pulled in and parked beside a solitary diesel truck.

The diner smelled like all diners—of boiled coffee and ancient grease, of lye rising from the white and black tiled floor. The counterman wore a soiled white apron and a white cap. He was making change for the only other customer, the driver of the diesel truck.

"Well, Scotty, you sure got a problem," the truck driver was saying, chewing thoughtfully on a toothpick.

"I *know* I got a problem," the counterman said. "Don't nobody have to tell me that. But what do I do about it? I mean, what would you do, Nick?"

The truck driver shifted the toothpick to the other side of his mouth. "It beats me, Scotty, it sure does. Don't get mixed up in nothing is all I could advise you."

"Yeah," Scotty said dubiously. "I

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know. But every time I think of that poor sick old man . . . Oh, well."

"Let old man Blandford watch out for himself," Nick advised. "See ya next time through."

"Take it slow, Nick." Scotty turned to Madden. "What'll it be, mister?"

"Hamburger special, mashed, peas."

Scotty nodded and turned on the gas under the grill. He was a big, ruddy, strong-featured man in his thirties, with close-cropped black hair and direct blue eyes. Madden, who was thin and swarthy and quick-eyed, felt uncomfortable around men like Scotty. They never seemed quite human to him, those frank, open, guileless, countrybred men, laboring year after year at some unpleasant and unrewarding job, monotonously honest, invincibly dull.

But then, Madden was uncomfortable around most people. It was a natural result of Madden's line of work.

Scotty put the hamburger on the grill and stared at it thoughtfully. He said, "I just reckon I should do something about it."

"Eh?" Madden said.

Scotty blinked, embarrassed, then rubbed the side of his sturdy jaw. "Lord, I'm thinking out loud now! I got that poor old Mr. Blandford on my mind, and I just don't know what to do." Scotty glared at the sizzling hamburger. "Poor old man's got no family, no friends except me. He could die in that big old house without a soul to give him comfort."

Madden stifled a yawn. In his line of work he moved frequently from city to city, quite fast, and often by devious routes. He knew these lonely countermen in their aluminum diners. Give them a chance and they'd tell you every dull detail about their wives, children, aged parents, army buddies, pets, and hobbies.

But some of these yarns could be pretty funny, and even lead him to a bit of work. And Madden had no newspaper with him. So he said, "What's wrong with the old guy?"

Scotty turned the hamburger over. "This Mr. Blandford, he lives in a big old house on the highway. He's been alone there ten—no, eleven years—ever since Mrs. Blandford passed away. Never goes out. Never lets anyone in except me with the groceries. He's got arthritis in both hands so bad he can hardly lift a frying pan. And his heart's bad to boot. Last time I brought the groceries, I found him passed out on the stairs and gasping like a fish."

"So?" Madden asked. "What's the trouble?"

"The trouble? But I just told you! He's got this bad ticker. Why, he could have another attack any time. He could die in that big old house without a soul to give him comfort."

"Oh," said Madden, disappointed.

Scotty served the hamburger steak. "Thing is," the counterman went on, "that poor silly old man is just

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asking for trouble. He's rich, but he hasn't spent hardly a cent of money since Mrs. Blandford passed on. Keeps it in a little old safe in the attic."

"Hmm," Madden said, his interest suddenly reawakening.

"It's no secret. Everybody knows about that safe," Scotty said angrily. "What's to stop somebody from breaking in and cleaning out the place?"

"True," Madden murmured.

"Old man with arthritis in both hands ain't going to stop nobody," Scotty brooded. "And with that bum heart of his, the shock would probably kill him."

Madden finished and paid his check.

"So you see? I think I should do something," Scotty said, his direct blue eyes troubled. "Maybe I should tell the county board he's out of his head."

"Leave it alone," Madden advised. "You think he'd be happier in some old man's home? Nobody's happy locked up," he added with conviction.

"Maybe not, maybe not. And it *isn't* any of my business, I know. But damn it, I've known that man since I was a kid. I used to mow his lawn. His wife used to make cookies—"

"Forget it," Madden said. "Keep the change."

"Thanks. I guess I should forget it. Call again," he said, as Madden left.

The sunset had faded to a dirty red, and the white highway had an unreal twilight look. Madden switched on his parking lights and drove west, until he came to a high old house set back from the highway. He slowed down, peering anxiously until he saw, almost hidden by tall grass, a faded sign reading *Blandford*. He drove on.

In twenty minutes it had grown dark. Madden switched on his driving lights, made a U turn, and started back, humming softly to himself. He went by the Blandford house again, and, fifty yards past it, came to a stop. He glanced up and down the highway, but could see no headlights. Quickly he cut his own lights and pulled off the road, behind a huge unlit billboard.

So far, so good. He took a snub-nosed .38 revolver from his breast pocket, checked the safety, and put it back. Lighting a cigarette, he leaned back and stared thoughtfully in the direction of the high old house.

He didn't like the country, that vast and dubious region which separated New York from Chicago. What kind of people could live in a land of farms and highways and small grimy towns? To Madden they were a strange race. He put nothing past them.

But business was business. From the glove compartment he removed a pair of sneakers and slipped them on. He pulled a small black bag from under the seat and took, after some

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thought, a screwdriver, a small flashlight, a piece of wire, a jimmy, a tin-edged knife, and a file. He distributed these among his pockets, and stepped out of the car.

City-bred, Madden covered the fifty yards to the house like an alley cat. Twigs and branches were comparable to tin cans and refuse bags. He avoided them automatically.

At the house there was only a single dim light burning in a downstairs room. Madden circled the house until he saw, on the far side, the window of the attic room. A trellis led up the side of the house. Madden shook it and found it firm. He wiped the perspiration from his hands and began to climb.

The trellis ended at the second floor, but an iron drainpipe continued to the roof. The pipe seemed strong enough. Madden rested for a moment, then swarmed up the pipe to the attic window.

It was slightly ajar, and the room within was black and impenetrable. Madden listened, but could hear no sound. He slid over the sill with the soft, dry sound of a snake gliding over a rock, and lay crouched on the floor, waiting.

The silence was thick around him, and the darkness pressed against his eyes and filled his mouth. He waited for the shapes of furniture to loom black against the lesser blackness. But nothing changed, and Madden knew at last the darkness of a country night, without street lights or neon signs.

He stretched his hand to the right, slowly. He extended his fingers, unwillingly, for an ancient and irrational part of Madden's mind expected contact with something warm and wet and slimy. Instead, he touched the cool metal surface of the safe.

At the same moment he heard a soft creak on the stairs beyond.

He gripped his revolver and waited, praying that the abnormal darkness would lift. It couldn't be that dark! He wondered if he had gone blind. And for a fraction of a second he had the fantasy that he had indeed gone blind, that the room was brilliantly lighted, that harsh-faced country men were standing along the wall watching him as he crawled on the floor like a blind slug. The thought was so brief that Madden didn't remember it a moment later when the stairs creaked a second time.

Black as hell, he told himself; *just exactly* as black as hell. And old houses creak and grumble to themselves all night long.

There was no further sound. He touched his revolver again, for reassurance, and crept to the safe. With his ear pressed against the cool metal, he began to turn the dial.

Suddenly he heard a soft cough from the opposite side of the room.

Madden whirled, instinctively hunching his shoulders, the revolver ready.

A voice said, "What are you doing here?"

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For a moment Madden was paralyzed. Then he began to think furiously.

"What do you want?" the voice asked.

Now he had it, Madden thought. The old man must *live* in this attic room, near his precious safe!

"I know there's someone here," said the voice, thin, cracked, querulous.

Madden lifted his revolver, then lowered it again. For one thing, he had nothing to aim at. For another, he was no murderer. He had a skill of which he was proud, but he had no desire to branch out into other fields. He had even less desire to hang a sentence of murder over his head.

A very unpleasant situation, Madden thought, wishing he had never undertaken this caper in the dubious and unpredictable realm of the country. Something like this could never happen in the city, where there was light even on the darkest night.

But what was unnerving him? Certainly not an arthritic old man with a bad heart!

That heart, of course, was Madden's solution.

"Here I am!" Madden screamed at the top of his lungs, turning on his flashlight and shining it across the room. "Here I am—here, *here, HERE!*"

The beam of his light caught a heavy, old-fashioned desk. Behind the desk he glimpsed the curve of a man's bald head.

There was a flash of orange light, briefly illuminating the room, then instantly gone. Madden felt a heavy blow on his chest. Who had struck him, he wondered. Surely not the old man.

He tried to shout again, but his mouth was filled with blood. He couldn't understand it. Then he knew . . .

The lights went on. A heavy, bald, hard-faced old man stood up with a grunt, bent over Madden, and felt his pulse. He nodded to himself, walked to the telephone on the desk, and dialed a number.

He explained briefly what had happened.

"Yes . . . Yes . . . That's right, in through the attic window. Slippery sort of fellow. Couldn't tell where he was. Then he started screaming and flashing a flashlight. How could I miss?"

The old man listened, then said, "Of course. He probably parked his car behind the billboard. Hurry over and take it away. Eh? Of course, of course. You'll get your usual cut, Scotty."

Old Mr. Blandford hung up. He put his revolver with the silencer back into its drawer and began systematically to go through Madden's pockets.

"O"

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **STEVE APRIL**

TITLE: ***College Copper***

TYPE: Detective Story à la **Black Mask**

DETECTIVE: A rookie cop

LOCALE: A city in the United States

TIME: The present

COMMENTS: *The rookie cop had been out of Police Academy only eight months. The big brass were positive that he had been careless, that he had killed Patrolman Hayes just as surely as if he had pulled the trigger himself . . .*

HIS FACE WAS FULL OF THE BLANK, disinterested expression of the dead; his large cop's body sprawled across the sidewalk. There wasn't a thing to say and nobody said anything—but they were thinking it. That's what hurt—and hurt hard. They were thinking I had killed Ed, as surely as if I'd squeezed the trigger.

The Homicide brass from downtown—I think he was an Acting Inspector—asked me, "How long you been on the force?" His eyes said I looked like a kid, too young to be a police officer.

"Eight months, sir. I took the police exam in my senior year in college and was appointed when I . . ."

"A college copper," he said, and you could put anything you wanted into his voice—even a sneer.

It didn't call for an answer, so I just stood there. Homicide was lean and thin, ageless, and in a weary voice he said, "Okay, let's have your story again. What happened?"

I winced at "your story" as I said, "Well, sir, I was on this post—it's been my regular beat for the last two weeks—and several times I'd noticed this heavy-set fellow walking a poodle. A big black French poodle with one of these bushy, fancy haircuts. Being fond of dogs I . . ."

"Get to the point," the tired Homicide voice cut in. "I'm not interested if you're a dog lover or not."

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"Yes, sir. Merely telling you this because it was the dog that first attracted my attention. Then there was something in the man's face that . . . well, it rang a bell in my mind. The avenue over there is the end of my post and the start of Ed's—Officer Hayes', that is—and this afternoon the fellow was walking his poodle just as Ed and I met at the end of our beats. I asked Ed if there wasn't something familiar about the man's face, the over-large lips for such a small mouth . . . Ed took a hard look and said, 'Lord, that's Swanson, the hospital lab murderer! Dyed his hair black and shaved off his pointed mustache, but I remember those lips—that's him!'

"Well, sir, Ed was right. Despite the dyed hair there was no mistaking Swanson. It was the same face I'd seen on the Wanted flyers back at the precinct house. Knowing he was said to be cunning and dangerous, Ed and I moved in on him with our guns out. As expected, he first denied his identity, but when we said we were taking him in for questioning, he admitted he was Swanson. I frisked him, then left him with Ed while I went to the call box on the next street and phoned in for a car. When I returned Ed was . . . dead."

"Sure you frisked him thoroughly?" the Homicide man snapped.

"Yes, sir. I'd have sworn Swanson didn't have a gun, or even a penknife on him. I was—am—absolutely certain."

There was a moment of heavy silence, while their eyes stared at me, saying I hadn't searched Swanson thoroughly, that it was my fault he'd been able to throw a gun on Ed and kill him. Hell, I even *felt* it was my fault.

The Homicide man then said slowly, "From his past record it's unlikely Swanson had an accomplice—these nutty killers usually work alone. Of course we can't rule out an accomplice, but it seems more probable he had a gun hidden . . . some place on him. Maybe in his hat or . . ."

I said, "He wasn't wearing a hat."

"There are three .22 calibre slugs in Officer Hayes's heart, all fired from close range. A .22 can be a very small gun, easy to overlook."

"I didn't overlook anything, sir," I said, as distinctly as I could.

". . . from the angle of the slugs we know they were fired *up* into Hayes's body. Perhaps Swanson had an ankle holster, bent down to tie his shoe and . . ."

"I went over his ankles. I . . ." My voice trailed off. Ed's dead body was calling me a liar, yet I *was* certain Swanson had not been armed. This had been the first time I ever frisked a wanted man, and I had done it by the book.

We stood around another couple of minutes, the curious crowd across the street watching with almost morbid satisfaction—a cop had been killed. The Detective Squad was combing the neighborhood, asking

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about a man with a black French poodle. Now one of the detectives returned and said, "Found his room. On the next block. He was known there as George Davis."

The Acting Homicide Inspector, the precinct captain, and the rest of the brass went up to his room. I tagged along because no one told me not to. It was a modest room, very neat, and the elderly landlady was in tears. "Mr. Davis, that you say is this Mr. Swanson, was the nicest man. Never drank and so quiet. And he was always reading."

Swanson was one of these self-educated guys who went in for heavy reading—Spinoza, Plato's *Republic,* critical studies of abstract art, Homer's *Odyssey,* Kant . . .

"The brainy type, educated—like you," Homicide said, and again his voice was full of whatever you read into it, especially sarcasm.

"Yes, sir. I . . ." Staring at the books, I stopped talking.

"What's the matter?"

"Sir, if you give me twenty-four hours I believe I can collar Swanson."

The Homicide man shook his head. "First you're a careless rookie, now you're a super movie detective. What's the deal?"

"He'll have to take that poodle out some time during the day or night. When he's spotted, I'd like to be told. Let me take him in."

"That's your great big brainstorm? Once we spot him, what the hell do we need you for?"

"You see, sir, he . . ." I began.

"And Swanson will be sure to be rid of the dog by now."

"No, sir. I don't think he'll part with it," I said, but the Homicide man was already walking away.

I hung around the precinct house. My sergeant told me to go home but I kept hanging around. It was tough—every time a man reported in for the next tour, there would be a whispered conversation, and then long stares in my direction. All cabs had been checked, but they hadn't picked up a man with a black French poodle. To me that meant Swanson was still in the neighborhood.

Just before they turned out the platoon at 4 P.M., I spoke to as many men as I could, asked them to call me if they saw a man with a poodle —any big poodle, the dog might be dyed white or brown by now. I begged them to phone me before they approached Swanson. They all said they would, that they understood . . . and "understood" meant they still thought I was responsible for Ed's death.

Midnight came and another change of tours. No one had seen a poodle being walked. Swanson and the dog might be hiding in a backyard where there would be no need to walk the dog. I went out for coffee again—I was on a coffee jag and my nerves were starting to rub raw.

As I came out of the coffee pot I almost walked into Tilton, a cop who had been in the same class at

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the Police Academy with me. His post took in the precinct house. He said, "On my way to call you. Guy walking a poodle around the corner from the station . . ."

I started running. That would be Swanson, the clever boy, playing it close to the police station. Rounding the corner I saw him. Even in the dim street light I could make out his heavy body, the fancy haircut of the dog. Tilton must have been a track man: he passed me before I could call out, and gun in hand he stopped Swanson.

"What's this? Against the law to walk a dog?" Swanson demanded.

Frisking him, Tilton said with real surprise, "He *is* clean."

My gun was still in my holster, but loose. I told Tilton to go back to the station for a car.

"Listen, that's how Ed got . . ."

"Get a car."

Tilton looked at me hard for a split second. It was his arrest, and I had no right to give him orders. Then he shrugged and put his gun away. "Okay, I'll be back in a rush. Watch yourself." I heard him running as I kept my eyes on Swanson.

The heavy man had an emotionless face, cool eyes. But when the poodle whined Swanson's odd lips formed a thick smile that somehow softened his face. He said, "You are frightening my poor Monsieur Clichy. May I pet him?"

"Go ahead."

As he bent down to pet the dog I shot Swanson twice through the head. He fell to the sidewalk, astonishment written on his round face.

Two patrolmen were holding the poodle on his back under a strong desk light. The Homicide man grunted as he saw the .22 strapped to the dog's belly, lost in the curly black hair. I said, "Swanson *was* clean when I frisked him, but then he must have gone through his petting-the-dog act with Ed and came up with the .22 spitting lead."

"How come you thought of it?"

"One of the books in Swanson's room gave me the idea, sir. Homer's *Odyssey*."

"Some guy once wrote about doing a murder like this?"

"No, sir. The *Odyssey* is a myth."

"You mean a fairy tale?"

"I suppose it could be called that, sir. You see, Ulysses was returning to Greece from Troy and he stopped at an island for food. He and his crew were captured by a one-eyed giant, Cyclops. They blinded the giant and when Cyclops let his sheep out of the cave, Ulysses and his men escaped by hanging onto the underhair of the sheep . . ."

"But sheep aren't as big as men," Homicide cut in.

"Cyclops being a giant had giant sheep," I explained.

"Fairy tales and a pooch solve a cop killing—what's the force coming to?" Homicide muttered.

As I said, you could put any meaning you wanted into the Acting Inspector's voice—even admiration.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GEORGES SIMENON**

TITLE: ***The Most Obstinate Man in Paris***

TYPE: Detective-Suspense Story

DETECTIVE: Inspector Maigret

COMMENTS: *Paris in the spring, with the chestnut trees in sweet bloom . . . All day the stranger sat in the old-fashioned café. He neither ate nor smoked. For sixteen solid hours he barely moved a muscle. It was uncanny . . . Paris in the spring—oh, that Maigret!*

IN ALL THE ANNALS OF PARIS POLICE no one had ever posed so long or so assiduously for a *portrait parlé*. For hours on end—sixteen, to be exact—he seemed so stubbornly intent on attracting attention that Inspector Janvier himself came in to look him over at close range. Yet when it was necessary to detail his description, the outlines were blurred and inexact. And some of the dozen witnesses, none of them regularly given to flights of imagination, were sure that the stranger's ostentation was nothing less than a skillful trick.

It all happened on May 3—a warm, sunny day with the special feel of a Parisian spring in the air. The chestnut trees of the Boulevard Saint-Germain were in full bloom and their delicate, faintly sweet fragrance drifted into the cool interior of the café from morning till night.

As he did every day, Joseph opened the doors of the café at eight in the morning. He was in vest and shirt-sleeves. The sawdust he had scattered on the floor the night before at closing time was still there and the chairs were piled high on the marble-topped tables. For the Café des Ministères, at the corner of the Boulevard Saint-Germain and the Rue des Saints-Pères, was one of the rare old-fashioned cafés still left in Paris. It had resisted the influx of the hurried drinkers who had only time for a quick one. And it had resisted the rage of gilt fixtures, indirect lighting, mirrored pillars, and flimsy plastic taborets.

Translated from the French by Lawrence G. Blochman; *© 1947 Presses de la Cité, Paris*

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It was a café of regulars, where every customer had his own table in his own corner and his own cards or chess set. Joseph the waiter knew them all by name—most of them bureau chiefs and government clerks from neighboring ministries.

Joseph himself was something of a personage in his own right. He had been a waiter for thirty years and it was difficult to imagine him wearing street clothes. Most of his regular customers would probably not recognize him if they met him on the street or in the suburbs where he had built himself a little house.

Eight o'clock was the hour of cleaning up and setting to rights. The double door was wide open on the Boulevard Saint-Germain. There was sunshine on the sidewalk, but inside the café there was only cool, bluish shadow. Joseph smoked as he went about the ritual of getting ready for the day's business. It was his only cigarette of the day. First he lit the gas under the coffee boiler, then polished the nickel until it shone like a mirror. Next he put the bottles on the shelves behind the bar, the apéritifs first, then the spirits. After that he swept up the sawdust and finally he set the chairs around the tables.

The man arrived at exactly ten minutes past eight. Joseph was busy at the coffee boiler and did not see him come in, a fact which he afterward regretted. Had the man rushed in furtively like someone being pursued? And why had he chosen the Café de Ministères, when the bar across the street was already bustling with customers drinking their morning coffee and eating croissants and rolls.

As Joseph later described it: "I turned around and saw somebody already inside—a man wearing a gray hat and carrying a small valise."

The café was really open without being open. It was open because the doors were not closed, but nobody ever came in at this hour. The water was barely warm in the coffee machine and some of the chairs were still piled on the tables.

"I won't be able to serve you for at least half an hour," Joseph said.

He thought that settled matters, but the man merely lifted a chair from a table and sat down, still holding tight to his traveling bag.

"It really doesn't matter," said the stranger calmly, with the air of a man who is not easily dissuaded.

His tone was enough to put the waiter in bad humor. Joseph was like a housewife who hates to have people around at cleaning time. He had a right to be alone while he was doing his housework. He grumbled:

"You'll have a long wait for your coffee."

He continued his daily routine until nine o'clock, favoring the stranger with an occasional glance. Ten times, twenty times, he passed very close to the man, brushed against him, even jostled him a few times while he was sweeping up the

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sawdust and taking down the remainder of the chairs.

At a few minutes past nine he reluctantly brought the man a cup of scalding coffee, a small pitcher of milk, and two lumps of sugar on a saucer.

"Don't you have any croissants?"

"The place across the street has croissants."

"It really doesn't matter," the stranger said.

It was a curious thing, but this man who must know he was in the way, who must know that he was in the wrong café at the wrong time, had a certain humility about him that made him rather likable. And there were other things which Joseph noted with appreciation. During a whole hour the man did not take a newspaper from his pocket, nor did he ask for a paper, nor did he consult the directory or the telephone book. Nor did he try to engage the waiter in conversation. And that was not all: he did not smoke, he did not cross and uncross his legs, he did not fidget. He merely sat.

Not many people could sit in a café for an hour without moving, without looking at the time every few minutes, without showing their impatience in one way or another. If this man was waiting for someone, he was certainly waiting with extraordinary equanimity.

At precisely ten o'clock Joseph finished his housework. The man was still there. Another curious detail struck Joseph: the stranger had not taken a chair by the window, but sat at the rear of the café near the mahogany stairway that led down to the washrooms. Joseph would be going downstairs soon himself to spruce up a little, but first he cranked down the orange-colored awning which gave a faint tint to the shadows inside.

Before going downstairs the waiter jingled a few coins in his vest pocket, hoping the man would take the hint, pay his bill, and leave. The man did nothing of the kind. Joseph left him sitting alone as he went down to change his starched collar and dickey, comb his hair, and put on his worn alpaca jacket. When he came back, the man was still there, still gazing into his empty coffee cup.

Mademoiselle Bethe, the cashier, had come in and was sitting at her desk, taking things out of her handbag. Joseph winked at her. The cashier winked back and started arranging the brass checks in regular piles. She was plump, soft, pink, and placid, and her hair was bleached. When she had finished with the checks, she looked down at the stranger from her throne-like perch.

"He gave me the impression of being a very gentle, very respectable person," she said later. "And I could have wagered that he dyed his mustache, like the Colonel."

It was true that the blue-black tint of the man's little mustache suggested hair dye, just as the turned-up ends suggested the curling iron and wax.

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Another part of the daily routine was the delivery of the ice. A giant with a piece of sacking on his shoulder carried in the opaline blocks, dripping a limpid trail as he put them away in the ice chest. He, too, noticed the solitary customer.

"He made me think of a sea lion," he said later.

Why a sea lion? The iceman couldn't say exactly.

As for Joseph, he kept strictly to his time table. It was now time to remove yesterday's newspapers from their long-handled binders and to replace them with today's editions.

"Could I trouble you to pass me one of those?"

Well, well! The customer spoke at last—timidly, softly, but he spoke.

"Which paper do you want? *Le Temps? Le Figaro? Les Débats?*"

"It really doesn't matter."

That was another thing that made Joseph think the man was not a Parisian. He was not a foreigner either, for he had no accent. Probably just off the train from the provinces. And yet there was no railway station in the immediate vicinity. Why would a man come halfway across Paris to sit in a strange café? And it was a strange café, because Joseph, who had a memory for faces, was certain he had never seen the man before. Strangers who entered the Café des Ministères by chance knew at once they did not belong there and promptly went away.

Eleven o'clock—the hour of the boss's arrival. Monsieur Monnet came downstairs from his apartment, freshly shaven, his cheeks aglow, his gray hair neatly slicked down, his perennial patent leather shoes gleaming below his gray trousers. He could have retired from business long ago. He had bought a provincial café for each of his children, but he himself could live no other place in the world than this corner of the Boulevard Saint-Germain where all his customers were his friends.

"Everything all right, Joseph?"

The boss had spotted the stranger and his coffee cup immediately. His eyes asked questions. Behind the counter, Joseph whispered: "He's been here since eight this morning."

Monsieur Monnet walked back and forth in front of the stranger, rubbing his hands as if to invite conversation. Monsieur Monnet was used to talking to his customers. He played cards and dominoes with them. He knew their family troubles, their office gossip. But the stranger did not open his mouth.

"The man appeared very tired, like someone who had spent a sleepless night in a train," the boss said later.

And very much later Inspector Maigret asked the three of them, Joseph, Mademoiselle Berthe, and Monsieur Monnet: "Did he seem to be watching for somebody in the street?"

Their answers were different.

"No," said Monsieur Monnet.

"I got the impression he was waiting for a woman," said the cashier.

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"Several times I caught him looking toward the bar across the street," said Joseph, "but each time he lowered his eyes almost immediately."

At twenty past eleven, the stranger ordered a small bottle of Vichy. Several of Joseph's customers drank mineral water, and for reasons which Joseph knew. Monsieur Blanc, for instance, of the War Ministry, was on a strict diet. Joseph noted that the stranger neither drank nor smoked, which was most unusual.

For the next two hours he lost track of the man, for the regulars had begun to swarm in for their before-lunch apéritifs. Joseph knew in advance what each would drink and to which tables he should bring playing cards.

"Garçon!"

It was past one. The stranger was still there. His valise had been pushed under the red-plush banquette. Joseph pretended he thought the man was asking for the check, and he made his calculation half aloud.

"Eight francs fifty," he announced.

"Could you serve me a sandwich?"

"I'm sorry. We have none."

"Haven't you any rolls, either?"

"We don't serve any food here."

Which was both true and false. Sometimes in the evening a bridge player who had missed his dinner could get a ham sandwich, but it was not usual.

The man shook his head and murmured: "It really doesn't matter."

This time Joseph thought the man's lips trembled slightly. He was struck by the resigned, sorrowful expression on the stranger's face.

"Could I serve you something?"

"Another coffee, please, with plenty of milk."

The man was hungry and the milk would be a little nourishment. He did not ask for other newspapers. He had had time to read the first one from first line to last, including the classified ads.

The Colonel arrived and was distinctly unhappy because there was someone seated at his table. The Colonel was afraid of the slightest draught—spring draughts were the most treacherous of all—and always sat far back in the café.

Armand, the second waiter—he had been a waiter only three years and would never look like a real *garçon de café* if he remained a waiter all his life—came on duty at one thirty. Joseph immediately went behind the glass partition to eat the lunch brought down from the second floor.

Why did Armand think the stranger might have been a rug seller or a peanut vender?

"He gave me the feeling of not being frank and open," said Armand later. "I didn't like the way he looked at you from under his eyelids. There was something oily, something too sweet in his face. If I had my way I'd have told him he was in the wrong pew and thrown him out on his ear."

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Others noticed the man, particularly those who came back in the evening and found him sitting in exactly the same place.

True, all these witnesses were amateurs, but the professional who was to come upon the scene later was just as vague and full of contradictions.

For the first ten years of his career Joseph had been a waiter at the Brasserie Dauphine, a few steps from the Quai des Orfèvres, which was frequented by most of the inspectors and detectives of the Police Judiciaire. He had become a close friend of Inspector Janvier, one of Maigret's best men, and in time married Janvier's sister-in-law.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, seeing the man still in the same place, Joseph began to get really irritated. He formulated a hypothesis, to wit, that if this fellow stubbornly clung to his banquette it was not for love of the atmosphere inside the Café des Ministères but for fear of what lay outside. When he got off the train, Joseph reasoned, the man must have felt that he was being followed, and had come to the café to avoid the police. So Joseph telephoned the Quai des Orfèvres and asked for Inspector Janvier.

"I've got a funny customer here who's been sitting in his corner since eight this morning and who seems determined not to budge," he said. "He hasn't eaten anything all day. Don't you think you ought to come over and take a look at him?"

The meticulous Janvier packed up a collection of the latest "Wanted" notices and headed for the Boulevard Saint-Germain. By a curious chance, at the very moment he stepped into the Café des Ministères, the place was empty.

"Flown the coop?" he asked Joseph.

The waiter pointed to the basement stairs. "Gone to telephone."

What a pity! A few minutes sooner and Janvier could have had the call monitored. As it was, the Inspector sat down and ordered a Calvados.

The stranger come back to his table, still calm, perhaps a trifle worried, but certainly not nervous. Joseph, who was getting to know the man, thought him rather relaxed.

For the next twenty minutes Janvier scrutinized the stranger from head to foot. He had plenty of time to compare the plump, rather vague features with the photos of the most-wanted criminals. Then he shrugged.

"He's not on our lists," Janvier told Joseph. "He looks to me like some poor guy who's been stood up by a woman. He's probably an insurance agent or something of the sort." He chuckled. "I wouldn't be surprised if he turned out to be a coffin salesman. Anyhow, I don't see that I have any right to pick him up. There's no law against a man going without lunch, if he wants to, or sitting all day in a café as long as he pays his tab."

After chatting with Joseph a while

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longer, Janvier returned to the Quai des Orfèvres for an appointment with Maigret. The two Inspectors were so engrossed in a gambling case that Janvier forgot even to mention the man of the Boulevard Saint-Germain to Maigret.

The dying rays of the sun slanted so low that they slid under the awnings of the Café des Ministères. At five o'clock three tables were taken by *belote* players. Monsieur Monnet himself took a hand at a table just opposite the stranger. From time to time he glanced at the man who still sat motionless.

By six o'clock the café was jammed. Joseph and Armand hurried from table to table, their trays loaded with bottles and glasses. The aroma of Pernod soon overpowered the delicate scent of the blossoming chestnut trees on the boulevard.

Each of the two waiters, during the rush hour, had his own tables. The man was sitting at a table in Armand's section. Not only was Armand less observant than his colleague, but he occasionally slipped behind the counter to toss off a glass of white wine. It was understandable, therefore, that the events of the evening may have seemed somewhat blurred to him.

All he could say for sure was that a woman finally came in.

"She was a brunette, well dressed, respectable looking, not at all one of these women who sometimes drop into a café and try to strike up a conversation with strangers."

She was, according to Armand, a woman who would wait in a public place only because she had a date with her husband. There were several vacant tables, but she sat down at the table next to the man.

"I'm sure they didn't speak to one another," Armand said later. "She ordered a glass of port. I think I remember that besides her handbag —a brown or black leather bag— she was carrying a small package in her hand. I noticed it on the table when she ordered the port. It was tied up in paper. But when I brought her order, the package was no longer on the table. She had probably put it on the banquette beside her."

Too bad that Joseph did not see the woman more clearly.

Mademoiselle Berthe saw her all right, from her high-perched desk.

"Rather nicely turned out," the cashier said later. "She wore a blue tailored suit, a white blouse, and almost no makeup. I don't know why I say this, but I don't think she was a married woman."

There was a constant flow of customers in and out of the café until eight o'clock, the dinner hour. Then the vacant tables began to be more numerous. At nine o'clock only six other tables were occupied, two by bridge players who never missed a daily session, and four by chess players.

"One thing is certain," Joseph said later, "the man knew bridge. And chess, too. I'd say he was a demon

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at both. I could tell by the way he was watching the games around him."

So he was not at all preoccupied? Or was Joseph mistaken?

At ten o'clock only three other tables were occupied. The men from the ministries went to bed early. At half-past ten, Armand went home. His wife was expecting a baby and he had arranged with the boss to leave early.

The man was still there, still sitting quietly.

Since ten minutes past eight that morning he had drunk three cups of coffee, a split of Vichy, and a bottle of lemon pop—nothing stronger. He had not smoked. He had read *Le Temps* during the morning and late in the afternoon he had bought an evening paper from a news vender who passed through the café.

At eleven o'clock Joseph started piling the chairs on the tables, as he did every evening, although two tables were still occupied. He also scattered the sawdust on the floor, as usual.

A little later one game broke up. Monsieur Monnet shook hands with his partners, one of whom was the Colonel, went to the cashier's desk for the little canvas bag into which Mademoiselle Berthe had stuffed the sheafs of banknotes and the small change, and climbed the stairs to his apartment.

Before leaving he glanced once more at the obstinate customer who had been a topic of general conversation that evening and said to Joseph:

"If he makes any trouble, ring me."

There was a push-button behind the bar which set off an alarm in Monsieur Monnet's private apartment.

And that was the whole story. When Maigret started his investigation next day, there was little more to be learned.

Mademoiselle Berthe had left at ten minutes to eleven to catch the last bus for Epinay. She, too, had looked at the stranger one final time before leaving.

"I can't say that he was nervous, exactly, but he wasn't exactly calm either. If I'd met him in the street, for instance, he would have scared me, if you know what I mean. And if he'd got off the bus at my stop in Epinay, I wouldn't have dared walk home all alone."

"Why?"

"Well, he had one of those inward looks."

"What do you mean by that?"

"He didn't pay attention to anything that was going on around him."

"Were the shutters of the café closed?"

"No. Joseph doesn't lower them until the last minute."

"From your desk you can see the street corner and the bar across the street. Did you notice any suspicious movements in either place? Did you see anyone who might have been watching for him, waiting for him?"

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"I wouldn't have noticed. As quiet as it is on the Boulevard Saint-Germain side, there's quite a bit of traffic in the Rue des Saints-Pères. And there's always people coming in and going out of the bar across the street."

"You didn't notice anyone outside this café when you left to go home?"

"Nobody. No, wait. There was a police officer at the corner."

The statement was confirmed by the district police station. Unfortunately the policeman was to leave his post a few minutes later.

Only two other tables were now taken, one by a couple who had dropped in for a drink after the movies, a doctor and his wife who lived a few doors down and often had a nightcap on their way home. They were considered regulars of the Café des Ministères. They had paid their check and were leaving.

The doctor said, "We were sitting just opposite him, and I observed that he was not a well man."

"In your opinion, Doctor, what was wrong with him?"

"His liver, no doubt about it."

"How old would you say he was?"

"It's hard to say. I'm sorry now that I didn't pay more careful attention. In my opinion he was one of those men who look older than their age. Some people would say he was forty-five or even more because of the dyed mustache."

"He did dye his mustache, then? You're sure of that?"

"I think he did. However, I've known patients of thirty-five with the same flabby, colorless flesh, the same lifeless air . . ."

"Don't you think the fact that he had nothing to eat all day may have given him his lifeless air?"

"Possibly. Nevertheless, that would not change my diagnosis. The man had a bad stomach, a bad liver, and, I may add, a defective intestinal tract."

The bridge game at the last occupied table—the last except the stranger's—went on and on. Every time game and rubber seemed on the point of ending the contest, the declarer failed to make his bid. At last a contract of five clubs, doubled and redoubled, was miraculously made, thanks to the nervous error of a tired player who unintentionally established the dummy's long side suit.

It was ten minutes before midnight when Joseph piled the last chairs on a table and announced: "We're closing, *messieurs.*"

The stranger did not move while the bridge players were settling their bill, and Joseph would have admitted that at that moment he was frightened. He was on the point of asking the four regulars to wait while he put the man out, but somehow he didn't dare. The regulars filed out, still talking about the last hand. They continued arguing for a moment on the street corner and then separately.

"Eighteen francs seventy-five," Joseph said, a shade too loudly. He

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was now alone with the stranger. He had already extinguished half the lights.

"I had my eye on an empty siphon of seltzer left over on the corner of the bar," he confessed to Maigret afterward. "One move and I would have bashed his head in."

"Did you put the siphon bottle there for that express purpose?"

Obviously he had. Sixteen hours spent with the enigmatic stranger had put Joseph's nerves on edge. The man had become a personal enemy, almost. Little by little Joseph had practically convinced himself that the man was there on the waiter's account exclusively, that he was waiting only for a propitious moment, a moment when they would be alone, to attack and rob him.

And yet Joseph made one mistake. While the man was fumbling in his pockets for change, still seated at his table, the waiter had gone out to crank down the iron shutters. He was afraid of missing his bus. True, the door was still wide open and there were still pedestrians on the boulevard, taking advantage of the midnight coolness.

"Here you are, *garçon*."

Twenty-one francs! Two francs twenty-five tip for a whole day! Joseph was furious. Only his professional composure of thirty years kept him from throwing the change back on the table.

"And maybe you were a little afraid of him, too?" Inspector Maigret suggested.

"I really don't know. Anyhow, I was in a hurry to be rid of him. In all my life I've never been infuriated by a customer like that. If I'd only foreseen that morning that he was going to stay all day!"

"Where were you at the exact moment he left the café?"

"Let me see . . . First I had to remind him that he had a valise under the banquette. He was going off without it."

"Did he seem annoyed that you reminded him of it?"

"No."

"Did he seem relieved?"

"He didn't act pleased or displeased. Indifferent, I would say. If I was looking for a cool customer, this was a cool customer. I've seen all kinds and shapes in the thirty years I've been a waiter, but I've never seen one who could sit behind a marble-topped table for sixteen hours straight without getting ants in his legs."

"And where were you standing?"

"Near the cashier's desk. I was ringing up the eighteen francs seventy-five. You've noticed there are two entrances here—the big double door that opens on the boulevard and the little one on the Rue des Saints-Pères. When he headed for the side door, I was going to call him back and show him the main entrance, but then I thought, *What's the difference? It's all the same to me.* I was through for the night, except to change my clothes and lock up."

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"In what hand was he carrying his valise?"

"I didn't notice."

"And I suppose you didn't notice either if he had one hand in his pocket?"

"I don't know. He wasn't wearing a topcoat. I didn't actually see him go out on account of the chairs piled on the tables. They cut off my view."

"You kept standing in the same place?"

"Yes, right here. I was taking the ticket out of the cash register with one hand, and with the other I was fishing in my pocket for the last of the day's brass checks. Then I heard an explosion—like a motor backfiring. Only I knew right away it wasn't a car. I said to myself, 'Well, well! So he got it after all!'

"You think very fast at a time like that. You have to in my line of business. I've seen some pretty tough brawls in my life. I'm always amazed at how fast a man thinks.

"I was mad at myself. After all, he was just a poor guy who had hid out here because he knew he'd get knocked off the minute he stuck his nose outside. So I was sorry for him. He didn't eat anything all day, so maybe he didn't have the money to call a taxi and make a getaway before he got ambushed."

"Did you rush right out to help him?"

"Well, as a matter of fact . . ." Joseph was embarrassed. "I think I probably hesitated a moment. I've got a wife and three children, you know. So first I pushed the button that rings in the boss's bedroom. Then I heard voices outside, and the sound of people running in the street. I heard a woman say, 'You stay out of this, Gaston.' Then I heard a police whistle.

"I went out. I saw three people standing in the Rue des Saints-Pères, several metres from the door."

"Eight metres," said Inspector Maigret, consulting the police report.

"Possibly. I didn't measure. A man was lying in the street and another man was stooping over him. I found out afterwards it was a doctor who was on his way home from the theatre and who just happens to be a customer of ours. We have quite a few doctors among our regulars.

"The doctor stood up and said, 'He's had it. The bullet entered the back of his neck and came out through the left eye.'

"Then the police officer arrived and I knew I'd be questioned. Believe it or not, I just couldn't look at the ground. That business about the left eye made me sick to my stomach. I didn't want to look at my customer in that shape, with his eye shot out. I told myself that it was partly my fault, that perhaps I should have—But after all, what could I have done?

"I can still hear the voice of the police officer, standing there with his notebook in his hand, asking: 'Doesn't anybody know this man?' And I answered automatically, 'I do. At least I think I—'

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"Finally I forced myself to bend down and look. I swear to you, Monsieur Maigret—and you know me well enough, what with all the thousands of glasses of beer and Calvados I used to serve you over at the Brasserie Dauphine, Inspector, to understand I'm not given to exaggerating—I swear to you I never had such a shock in my life.

"It was not the man! It was not the stranger who had sat all day in the café.

"It was somebody I didn't know, somebody I never saw before—a tall, skinny man in a raincoat. On a fine spring day, a night warm enough to sleep under the stars, and he was wearing a tan raincoat.

"I felt better. Maybe it's silly, but I was glad it wasn't our customer. If my customer had been the victim instead of the murderer, I would have felt guilty about it all my life. You see, since early morning I felt there was something not quite right about my man. I would have put my hand in the fire, that he was a wrong one. It wasn't for nothing that I phoned Janvier. Only Janvier, even if he is practically my brother-in-law, always does everything according to the rules. When I called him, why didn't he ask to see the man's identity papers? They would have told him something, certainly. A decent law-abiding citizen doesn't sit all day in a café and then go out and shoot somebody on the sidewalk at midnight.

"Because you'll note that he didn't loiter after the shot was fired. Nobody saw him. If he wasn't the one that pulled the trigger, he would have stayed right there. He couldn't have walked more than a dozen steps by the time I heard the gun go off.

"The only thing I don't understand is about this woman—the one that ordered a glass of port from Armand. How does she fit into this? Because there's no doubt she had something to do with this man. We don't get many unescorted women in our café—it's not that kind of a place."

"I thought," Inspector Maigret objected, "that the man and the woman did not speak to each other."

"Did they have to speak? Didn't she have a little package in her hand when she came in? Armand saw it, and Armand is not a liar. He saw it on the table and then he saw it wasn't on the table any more and he supposed she'd put it on the banquette. And when this lady left, Mademoiselle Berthe watched her go out because she was admiring her handbag and wishing she had one like it. Now Mademoiselle Berthe didn't notice that she was carrying a package then, and you must admit that women do notice such things.

"You can say what you like, but I still think I spent the whole day with a murderer. And I think I got off very lucky."

Dawn brought one of those perfect spring days such as Paris man-

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ages to produce about every third year, a day meant for nothing more strenuous than nibbling at a sherbet or remembering the carefree days of childhood. Everything was good, light, heady, and of rare quality: the limpid blue of the sky, the fleecy whiteness of the few clouds, the softness of the breeze that kissed your cheek as you turned a corner and that rustled the chestnut trees just enough to make you raise your eyes to admire the clusters of sweet flowers. A cat on a window sill, a dog stretched out on the sidewalk, a shoemaker in his leather apron leaning in his doorway for a breath of air, an ordinary green-and-yellow bus rumbling by—they were all precious that day, all designed to instill gaiety into the soul.

That is probably why Inspector Maigret has always kept such a delightful memory of the corner of the Boulevard Saint-Germain and the Rue des Saints-Pères. It is also the reason he was later to stop frequently at a certain café for a spot of shade and a glass of beer. Unfortunately, the beer never tasted quite the same after that day.

The case he was investigating was destined to become famous, not because of the inexplicable obstinacy of the stranger in the Café des Ministères, or of the midnight shooting, but because of the strange motive for the crime.

At eight the next morning Inspector Maigret was at his desk in the Quai des Orfèvres, all of his windows open on the blue-and-gold panorama of the Seine. He smoked his pipe with small, gluttonous puffs as he skimmed through the reports —and thus made his first contact with the man of the Café des Ministères and with the death in the Rue des Saints-Pères.

The police of the district Commissariat had put in a good night's work. Dr. Paul, the medical examiner, had finished his autopsy by six in the morning. The bullet and the empty shell case, which had both been found on the sidewalk, had already been submitted to Gastinne-Renette, the ballistics expert and a report was expected shortly.

The dead man's clothes, together with the contents of his pockets and several photographs of the scene made by Identification, were on Maigret's desk. Maigret picked up his phone.

"Would you step into my office, Janvier? According to the report, you seem to be somewhat involved in this case."

And so on that beautiful spring day Maigret and Janvier were once again teammates.

Maigret studied the clothing while he waited. The suit was of good quality and less worn than it seemed. It was the suit of a man who lived alone, without a woman to brush it off occasionally or to make him send it to the cleaners before it looked as though he had slept in it—which perhaps he had. The shirt was new and had not yet been to the laundry,

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but it had been worn for at least a week. The socks looked no better.

There were no papers in the pockets, no letters, no clues to the man's identity. The usual miscellany had some unusual additions: a corkscrew; a pocketknife with numerous blades; a dirty handkerchief; a button off his jacket; a single key; a well-caked pipe and a tobacco pouch; a wallet containing two thousand three hundred and fifty francs and a snapshot of half a dozen bare-bosomed native girls standing in front of an African straw hut; a piece of string; and a third-class railway ticket from Juvisy to Paris, bearing yesterday's date. And finally there was a toy printing set, the kind with which children could fit rubber letters into a small wooden frame and make their own rubber stamps.

The rubber letters in the frame formed the words:

I'LL GET YOU YET.

The medical examiner's report contained several interesting details. The shot had been fired from behind at a distance of not more than ten feet. Death had been instantaneous. The dead man had numerous scars. The ones on his feet were obviously caused by chigoes, African jiggers which burrow under the skin and have to be dug out with the point of a knife. His liver was in pitiful condition, a real drunkard's liver. And finally the man killed in the Rue des Saints-Pères had been suffering from a bad case of malaria.

"Here you are!" Maigret reached for his hat. "Let's go, Janvier, old man."

They walked to the Café des Ministères. Through the window they could see Joseph busy with his morning housework. But curiously enough, Maigret was more interested in the café across the street.

The two cafés were opposite in more ways than geographically. Joseph's domain was old-fashioned and quiet. The bar on the opposite corner —the sign read Chez Léon—was aggressively and vulgarly modern. At the long bar two waiters in shirt-sleeves worked busily behind pyramids of croissants, sandwiches, and hard-boiled eggs. Now they were serving little but coffee and white wine. Later it would be red wine and anise-flavored apéritifs.

At the far end of the bar the proprietor and his wife alternated at the tobacco counter. Beyond was the back room, garish with its red-and-gold pillars, its one-legged tables in rainbow plastic, and its chairs covered with goffered plush of an incredible red hue.

All the bay windows opened on the street and crowds swarmed in and out of the Chez Léon from morning to night—masons in powdery smocks, clerks and typists, delivery boys rushing in for quick ones before reclaiming their parked tricycle carriers; people in a hurry, people looking for a phone, and most of all, people who were thirsty.

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"One up! . . . Two Beaujolais! . . . Three bocks!"

The cash register played a continuous tune. The waiters and barmen sweated as they worked, sometimes mopping their brows with bar towels. Dirty glasses, dipped in murky water, did not even have time to dry before they were refilled with red or white wine.

"Two dry whites," Maigret ordered. He loved the din and tumult of the morning rush. And he liked the rascally after-taste of the white wine which he never found anywhere but in bistros of this sort.

"Tell me, *garçon,* do you remember this man?"

Identification had done a good job. Photographing a dead man may be an ignoble way of earning a living, but it is an essential and delicate art. The inexpert result is often hard to recognize, especially if the face has been damaged. So the gentlemen from Identification first touch up the corpse, then retouch the negative so that the subject looks almost alive.

"That's him, all right. Isn't it, Louis?"

The other waiter looked over his partner's shoulder.

"Sure, that's the guy who bothered hell out of us all day yesterday. How could we forget him?"

"Do you remember what time he first came in?"

"Well, that's hard to say. He's not a regular. But I remember around ten o'clock this guy was all steamed up about something. He couldn't sit still. He came to the bar and asked for a slug of white. He gulped it down, paid, and went out. Ten minutes later he was back, sitting at a table, yelling for another slug of white."

"So he was in here all day?"

"I think so. Anyhow I saw him at least ten or fifteen times. He kept getting more and more jittery. He had a funny way of looking at you, and his hands trembled when he handed you the money. Like an old woman's. Didn't he break a glass on you, Louis?"

"He did. And he insisted on picking all the pieces out of the sawdust himself. He'd say, 'It's white glass. That's good luck. And do I need good luck, specially today. You ever been in the Gabon, lad?' he'd keep asking."

"He talked to me about the Gabon, too," said the other waiter. "He was eating hard-boiled eggs. He'd eaten twelve or thirteen in a row, and I thought he was going to bust, particularly as he'd had quite a lot to drink. So he said to me, 'Don't be afraid, lad. One time in the Gabon I made a bet I could swallow three dozen, with thirty-six beers along with the eggs, and I won.'"

"Did he seem preoccupied?" Maigret asked.

"Depends on what you mean by that. He kept going out and coming back. I thought he was waiting for somebody. Sometimes I caught him laughing all by himself, like he'd been telling himself jokes. And once

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he cornered an old man who comes in every afternoon for two-three slugs of red, a nice old man. He grabbed the old man's lapels and talked his ear off for an hour."

"Did you know he was armed?"

"How could I know that?"

"Because a man of his type is apt to show off his revolver in a bar."

It was indeed a revolver. The police had found it on the sidewalk beside the body. It was a large caliber gun, loaded, but unfired.

"Let's have more of that white wine."

Maigret was in such high spirits that he could not resist the solicitations of a barefooted flower girl who came in at that moment. She was a skinny, dirty little elf with the most beautiful eyes in the world. Impulsively he bought a bouquet of violets which he then did not know what to do with, so he stuffed it into his coat pocket.

It must be said that this was a day for white wine. A little later Maigret and Janvier crossed the street and entered the savory gloom of the Café des Ministères. Joseph rushed to meet them.

Here they tried to straighten out the blurred portrait of the man with the little valise and the blue-black mustache. Or perhaps "blurred" is not the word. The picture was rather one in which either the subject or the camera had moved, or had been developed from a film with double or triple exposure.

No two descriptions matched. Everyone saw the stranger in a different light. And now there was even one witness—the Colonel—who swore that the minute he saw the man he was sure he was up to no good.

Some remembered the man as terribly nervous, others as amazingly calm. Maigret listened to them all, nodding, stuffing his pipe with a meticulous forefinger, lighting it with great care, smoking with little puffs, narrowing his eyes like a man enjoying a wonderful day—a day on which heaven, in a fit of good humor, had decided to be generous to all mankind.

"About this woman—"

"You mean the girl?"

Joseph, who had only caught a glimpse of her, was convinced it was a girl—a pretty girl, distinguished and obviously of good family. He was sure she did not work for a living. He imagined her in comfortable bourgeois surroundings, baking pastry or making genteel desserts for her family.

Mademoiselle Berthe, on the other hand, had doubts.

"I for one," the cashier said, "would hesitate to give her absolution without confession. However, I do admit that she seemed a lot more decent than the man."

There were moments when Maigret wanted to yawn and stretch himself, as though he were in the country, lying in the sun. That morning he found life enchanting at the corner of the Boulevard Saint-

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Germain and the Rue des Saints-Pères. He was fascinated by the bus stopping and starting, by the passengers climbing aboard, by the ritual gesture of the conductor reaching for the bell. And what could be more lovely than the moving shadow patterns on the sidewalk, the leafy tapestry of the chestnut trees?

"I'll wager he hasn't gone very far," Maigret grumbled to Janvier who was still vexed at not being able to give a more exact description of the man, after having looked him right in the face.

The two detectives left the café and paused a moment at the curb, staring at the bar across the street. Two men, two bars, one for each. It would appear that Fate has planted each man in his proper atmosphere: in one the calm man with the little mustache, the man who could sit all day without moving, who could live on coffee and soda, who did not even protest when Joseph told him there was nothing to eat. And across the street, in the noise and confusion of little people, of the press of secretaries and workmen and delivery boys, in the mad rush of white wine and hard-boiled eggs, the man who was too excited to wait, who popped in and out, button-holing people to talk to them of the Gabon.

"I'll wager that there's a third café," said Maigret, staring across the boulevard.

In that he was wrong. True, there was across the street a window that commanded a view of both corners and a window that obviously belonged to a public place of some kind. But it was neither bar nor café. It was a restaurant called A l'Escargot.

The restaurant consisted of one long, low-ceilinged room which was reached by two steps down from the street level. It was obviously a restaurant with a regular clientèle, for along the wall there was a row of pigeonholes in which the diners could leave their napkins. The pleasant garlicky aroma of good cooking permeated the place. It was the proprietress herself who emerged from the kitchen to greet them.

"What is it, *messieurs?*"

Maigret identified himself. He then said, "I'd like to know if you had a customer here last night who lingered over his dinner much longer than is usual in your restaurant."

The woman hesitated. There was no one in the dining room. The tables were already set for lunch. At each place there were tiny decanters of red and white wine.

"I spend most of my time in the kitchen," she said. "My husband would know. He's usually at the cash desk, but he's out right now buying fruit. Our waiter, François, doesn't come on until eleven, but he won't be long now. May I serve you something while you're waiting? We have a little Corsican wine which you might like. My husband has it shipped direct."

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Everybody was charming this fine spring day. The little Corsican wine was charming, too. And the low-ceilinged dining room where the two detectives waited for François was delightful. They watched the parade of pedestrians and the two cafés across the boulevard.

"You have an idea, Chief?"

"I've got several. But which is the right one, that's the question."

François arrived. He was a white-thatched old man who would never be taken for anything but a restaurant waiter. He backed halfway into a closet to change his clothes.

"Tell me, waiter. Do you remember a diner last night who acted rather strangely? A girl with dark hair?"

"A lady," François corrected. "Anyhow, I noticed she wore a wedding ring, a red-gold band. I noticed it because my wife and I wear red-gold wedding rings, too. Look."

"Was she young?"

"I'd say about thirty. Quite a proper person, well spoken, with almost no makeup."

"What time did she come in?"

"At quarter-past six, just as I finished setting the tables for dinner. Our regular clientèle hardly ever gets here before seven. She seemed surprised by the empty room and started to turn around. 'Do you want dinner?' I asked, because sometimes people come in by mistake, thinking this is a café. 'Come in,' I said. 'I can serve you dinner in about fifteen minutes. Would you like something to drink while you're waiting?' And she ordered a glass of port."

Maigret and Janvier exchanged satisfied glances.

"She sat down near the window. I had to ask her to move because she was sitting at the table of the gentlemen from the Registry Office. They've been coming here regularly for ten years and they don't like to sit at any other table . . . Actually, she had to wait nearly half an hour because the snails were not ready. She wasn't impatient, though. I brought her a newspaper, but she didn't read it. She just sat quietly and looked out the window."

Just like the man with the blue-black mustache. A calm man and a calm woman. And at the other corner a madcap with nerves as taut as violin strings. Only at this point in the drama it was the madcap who had the gun. It was the madcap who had a rubber stamp in his pocket with the threat: *I'LL GET YOU YET.*

And it was the madcap who had died without firing his gun.

"A very gentle woman," François was saying. "I thought she must be somebody from the neighborhood who had forgotten her key and was waiting for her husband to come home. That happens oftener than people think, you know."

"Did she eat with good appetite?"

"Let me see . . . A dozen snails . . . Then some sweetbreads, some cheese, and some strawberries and

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cream. I remember because those dishes all cost extra on the menu. She drank a small carafe of white wine and then a cup of coffee.

"She stayed quite late. That's what made me think she was waiting for somebody. She wasn't quite the last to leave, but there were only two other people here when she asked for her check. It must have been after ten o'clock. We usually close at ten thirty."

"Do you know which direction she took when she left?"

"I hope you gentlemen don't mean any harm to this lady?" The old waiter seemed to have an affection for his one-night customer. "Good. So then I can tell you that when I left here myself at quarter to eleven, I was surprised to see her across the street, standing near a tree. Look, it was the second tree to the left of the lamp post."

"Was she still waiting for someone?"

"She must have been. She's not the sort you're thinking of. When she saw me, she turned her head away, as if she was embarrassed."

"Tell me, waiter, did she have a handbag?"

"Of course."

"Was it big? Small? Did you see her open it?"

"Just a moment . . . No, she didn't open it. She put it on the window sill next to her table. It was of dark leather, rectangular, fairly large. It had a big letter on it—an *M*, I think, in silver or some other metal."

"Well, Janvier, old man?"

"Well, Chief?"

If they drank many more of these little glasses here and there, they would end up this fine spring day by acting like a couple of schoolboys on vacation.

"Do you think she killed him?"

"We know he was killed from behind, at not more than ten feet."

"But the man in the Café des Ministères could have—"

"Just a moment, Janvier. Which of these two men was going to attack the other?"

"The dead man."

"Who was not yet dead, but who was certainly armed. So he was the menace, the ambusher. He was a threat to the other. Under these conditions, unless he was dead drunk by midnight, it is unlikely that the other could have surprised *him* and shot *him* from behind on emerging from the Café des Ministères, especially at such short range. On the other hand, the woman—"

"What do we do now?"

If Maigret followed his inclination, they would have loitered a while longer in the neighborhood. He liked the atmosphere. He would go back for another white wine with Joseph. Then back to the bar across the street. Sniff around. Drink a little more wine. Play different variations on the same theme: a man with a waxed mustache here; a man across the street, rotten with fever and alcohol; and finally a woman so respectable looking that she had

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conquered the heart of old François, eating snails, sweetbreads, and strawberries and cream.

"I'll wager she's used to simple family cooking and eats out very rarely," said Maigret.

"Why do you say that, Chief?"

"The menu. She ordered three dishes that cost more than the regular dinner. People who eat out regularly don't do that, particularly two of the dishes which you rarely get at home—snails and sweetbreads. The two don't go together. The fact that she ordered them indicates she is something of a gourmand."

"You think a woman about to commit murder gives much thought to what she's eating?"

"First of all, my dear Janvier, we know nothing that *proves* she was going to kill anyone last night."

"If she did kill him, she must have been armed. Right? I got the drift of your questions about the handbag. I was waiting for you to ask the waiter if he thought it might be heavy."

"Second," Maigret went on, ignoring the interruption, "even the most poignant tragedy will not make most human beings unaware of what they are eating. You must have seen it as clearly as I have. Somebody is dead. The house is upside down. The place is filled with tears and wailing. Life will never resume its normal rhythm. Then somebody comes in to fix dinner—an old aunt, a neighbor, a neighbor's maid. 'I couldn't swallow a mouthful,' the widow swears. Everybody coaxes her. They make her sit down to the table. The whole family abandons the corpse and sits down with her. After a minute everybody is eating with gusto. And the widow is asking for the salt and pepper because the ragoût needs seasoning . . . Let's go, my dear Janvier."

"Where to, Chief?"

"To Juvisy."

They really should have caught a suburban train at the Gare de Lyon, but Maigret was horrified at the thought of ending a perfect spring day by fighting crowds of commuters at the ticket windows and on the platforms, ending up either in a No Smoking compartment or standing in the corridor. So, refusing to envisage what the auditor at Police Judiciaire might say about his expense account, Maigret hailed a taxi—an open car, almost brand-new—and spread himself luxuriously on the cushions.

"Juvisy," he told the driver. "Drop us across from the railway station."

He half closed his eyes and spent the journey in a delicious trance, only the trail of smoke from his pipe indicating that he was not asleep.

For a long time, whenever he was asked to tell the story of one of his most famous cases, Inspector Maigret used to describe some investigation in which his stubborn persistence, his intuition and his sense of human values, literally forced the truth to the surface.

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Nowadays, however, the story he likes to tell is the case of the two cafés in the Boulevard Saint-Germain, even though his own part in it was a rather slim one. And when he finishes with a satisfied smile that is almost a smacking of the lips, someone inevitably asks, "But what is the true story?"

Maigret smiles even more and says, "It's up to you. Pick the one you like best."

For on at least one point the whole truth was never discovered by Maigret or by anyone else.

It was half-past twelve when the taxi dropped the two Inspectors opposite the suburban railway station of Juvisy. The detectives first entered the Restaurant du Triage, an undistinguished oasis with a terrace surrounded by bay trees in green tubs. They exchanged questioning glances. Could they enter a café—especially today—without taking a drink? Maigret shrugged. Inasmuch as they had devoted themselves so far to white wine, like the dead man of the Rue des Saints-Pères, they might as well continue.

Maigret produced his retouched photograph of the cadaver and showed it to the prizefighter-looking man who was operating behind the zinc bar.

"Tell me, *patron,*" he said, "do you recognize this face?"

The man behind the bar held the picture at arm's length and squinted at it, as if he were far-sighted.

"Julie, come here a minute," he called. "Isn't this the bird from next door?"

His wife came in, wiping her hands on her blue-denim apron. She took the photograph gingerly in her fingers.

"Why, sure it is!" she exclaimed. "But he has a funny expression in this picture, hasn't he?" Turning to Maigret she added, "Probably stiff again. He's a great drinker. Just last night he kept us up past eleven o'clock, tossing them off."

"Last night?" Maigret was startled.

"No, wait a minute. It must have been the night before last. Yesterday I did my washing and last night I went to the movies."

"Can we have lunch here?"

"Sure you can have lunch. What do you want to eat? Veal fricandeau? Roast pork with lentils? And you can start with a good homemade pâté."

They ate outside on the terrace, next to the taxi driver they had asked to wait. From time to time the tavern-keeper came out to talk to them.

"My neighbor next door can tell you a lot more than I can," he said. "He rents rooms. We don't. Your man has been staying there for the last month or two. When it comes to drinking, though, he drinks all over town. Why, just yesterday morning—"

"Are you sure it was yesterday?"

"Positive. I was just opening up at six thirty when he came in. He tossed off two or three glasses of

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white wine. 'To kill the worms,' he said. Then all of a sudden he grabbed his raincoat and ran for the station. The Paris train was just leaving."

The tavern-keeper knew nothing about the man except that he drank a lot of wine, that he talked about the Gabon with or without the slightest provocation, that he was contemptuous of anyone who had not lived in Africa, and that he bore a bitter grudge against somebody. Who? The tavern-keeper didn't know, but he repeated a speech the man with the raincoat had once made:

"Some people think they are very clever, but they're not clever enough. I'll get them in the end. Sure, anybody can be a skunk at times, but there's a limit on how much of a skunk a man can be."

Half an hour later Janvier and Maigret were talking to the proprietor of the Hôtel du Chemin de Fer. It looked exactly like the place next door except that there were no bay trees around the terrace and the chairs were painted red, not green.

The proprietor had been behind the bar when they came in, reading a newspaper aloud to his wife and his waiter. When Maigret saw the likeness of the dead man on page one, he knew that the first editions of the evening papers had reached Juvisy. He himself had sent the photographs to the press.

"That your tenant?" Maigret asked.

The proprietor darted a suspicious glance. He put down the paper.

"Yes. So?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to know if he was your tenant."

"Good riddance, in any case."

Maigret hesitated. They were going to have to drink something again and it was too soon after lunch to drink any more white wine.

"Calvados," he ordered. "Two."

"You from the police?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. Your face is familiar. So?"

"I'm asking you what you think of the murder."

"I would have thought that he was the one to shoot somebody else, not get shot himself. Although it wouldn't have surprised me if he'd got his face kicked in. He was impossible when he was drunk, and he was drunk every night."

"Do you have his registration blank?"

With great dignity, to show that he had nothing to hide, the proprietor went for his register which he offered to Inspector Maigret with just a touch of contempt. The entry read:

Ernest Combarieu. Age 47. Born at Marsily, La Rochelle arrondissement (Charente-Maritime). Occupation: wood cutter. Coming from: Libreville, French Equatorial Africa.

"I hear he stayed with you for six weeks."

"Six weeks too long."

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"Didn't he pay his bill?"

"He paid regularly every week. But he was a lunatic—stark crazy. He used to stay in bed with the fever two or three days at a time, and he'd order rum sent up to cure him. He drank the rum right out of the bottle. Then he'd get up and make the rounds of every bistro in town. Sometimes he'd forget to come home, sometimes he'd wake us up at three o'clock in the morning to let him in. Sometimes I had to undress him and put him to bed. He used to vomit on the stairway carpet or on the rug in his room."

"Did he have any family here in town?"

Husband and wife looked at each other.

"He knew somebody here, that's certain. If it was a relative, our friend didn't like him, I can guarantee you that. He used to say to me, 'One of these days you're going to hear news about me and a scoundrel who everybody thinks is an honest man, but who is really a dirty hypocrite and the worst thief in the world.'"

"You never knew which man he was talking about?"

"All I know is that our tenant was unbearable and that when he was drunk he had the crazy habit of pulling out a big revolver, aiming across the room, and shouting, 'Bang! Bang!' Then he would burst out laughing and order another drink."

"You'll have a little drink with us, won't you?" said Maigret. "One more question. Do you know a gentleman in Juvisy who is medium height, plump but not fat, with a fine turned-up black mustache and who sometimes carries a small valise?"

The proprietor turned to his wife. "That mean anything to you, *bobonne?*"

The woman shook her head slowly. "No . . . Unless— No, he's shorter than medium and I never thought of him as plump."

"Who is this?"

"Monsieur Auger. He lives in a villa in the new subdivision."

"Is he married?"

"Oh, yes, to a very nice wife. Madame Auger is very pretty, very sweet —a homebody who almost never leaves Juvisy. *Tiens!* That reminds me—"

The three men looked at her expectantly.

"Yesterday while I was doing my laundry in the yard, I saw her walking toward the railway station. She must have been taking the four thirty-seven for Paris."

"She has dark hair, hasn't she? And she carried a black leather handbag?"

"I can't tell you the color of her handbag but she was wearing a blue tailleur and a white blouse."

"What does Monsieur Auger do for a living?"

This time the woman turned to her husband.

"He sells postage stamps," the

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landlord said. "You've seen his name in the classified ads—*Stamps for Collectors*. An envelope of a thousand foreign stamps for so many francs. Five hundred assorted for so much. A mail-order business, C.O.D."

"Does he travel much?"

"He goes to Paris from time to time. On stamp business, I suppose. He always carries his little valise. Two or three times when his train was late he stopped in here for a cup of coffee or a split of Vichy."

It was too easy. This wasn't even an investigation any more. It was a day in the country, an outing enlivened by a laughing spring sun and an ever-increasing number of the cups that cheer. And yet Maigret's eyes sparkled as though he had already guessed that behind this apparently banal affair lay one of the most extraordinary human mysteries he had ever encountered in his long career.

They gave him the address of the Augers. The new subdivision was quite a distance away, near the Seine. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of little villas had arisen there, each in its own little garden, some of stone, some of pink brick, others of blue or yellow stucco. The worst part of it was that the villas had names instead of numbers, and it took the two Inspectors a long time to find the villa *Mon Repos*.

The taxi rolled along new streets lined with half-finished sidewalks and newly planted trees as skinny as skeletons. Vacant lots separated many of the houses. They had to ask their way several times. After a number of wrong addresses, they finally reached their goal: a pink villa with a blood-red roof. A curtain in the corner window stirred slightly as Maigret and Janvier got out of the taxi.

"Should I wait outside, Chief?"

"Maybe you'd better. I don't expect any trouble, though. As long as there is somebody home."

He found the tiny bell-push in the too-new door. He heard the ring inside. Then he heard other sounds—whispering, footsteps, a door closing.

At last the street door opened. Standing before Maigret was the young woman of the Café des Ministères and the Escargot. She was wearing the same blue tailleur and white blouse she had worn the night before.

"I'm Inspector Maigret of the Police Judiciaire."

"I thought it might be the police. Come in."

He climbed a few steps. The stairway seemed to have just come from the carpenter's shop. So did all the woodwork. The plaster on the walls was scarcely dry.

"Come this way, please."

She signaled through a half-open door to someone Maigret could not see. Then she ushered the Inspector into the living room—the corner room with the curtains that had stirred a moment ago. There was a

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sofa with brightly colored silk cushions, books, bric-a-brac. On a coffee table there was the noon edition of a Paris newspaper with the dead man's photograph staring from the front page.

"Please sit down. Am I allowed to offer you something to drink?"

"Thank you, no."

"I should have suspected that it wasn't done. My husband will be here in a moment. You needn't worry. He won't try to run away. His conscience is clear. However, he has not been well all morning. We took the first train home today. He has a heart condition. He had a slight attack when we got home. He's up and dressed now, though. He's shaving."

Maigret nodded. He had heard the water running in the bathroom. The walls were not very thick in the new subdivision. He smiled at Madame Auger. She was quite pretty, in a wholesome, middle-class way. And she was quite calm.

"You must have guessed that I was the one who killed my brother-in-law," she said. "It was high time. If I had not killed him, my husband would be dead today. And after all, Raymond is worth a hundred Ernests."

"Raymond is your husband?"

"For the last eight years. We have nothing to hide, Monsieur l'Inspecteur. I know that we should have gone to the police with the whole story last night. Raymond wanted to do it, but I wouldn't let him. Because of his heart condition, I wanted him to get over the first shock before facing added complications. And I knew you would come here sooner or later."

"You mentioned your brother-in-law a moment ago. His name is different from your husband's."

"Combarieu was the husband of my sister Marthe. He used to be quite a nice fellow. Perhaps a little mad . . ."

"One moment. May I smoke?"

"Please do. My husband doesn't smoke because of his heart, but tobacco doesn't bother me a bit."

"Where were you born?"

"In Melun. We were sisters, Marthe and I, twin sisters. My name is Isabelle. We looked so much alike when we were tots that my parents —they're both dead now—used to put different colored ribbons in our hair so they could tell us apart. Sometimes we would play a joke on them and change the ribbons."

"Which one of you married first?"

"We were married the same day. Combarieu used to work at the Prefecture in Melun. Auger was an insurance broker. They knew each other because, as two bachelors, they used to eat in the same restaurant. My sister and I met them together, so we were married together. We even lived on the same street in Melun early in our marriage."

"During this time, Combarieu was still working at the Prefecture and your husband was still in the insurance business?"

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"Yes. But Auger was already interested in philately. He started his own stamp collection for pleasure, but he realized that stamps could be a lucrative business."

"What about Combarieu?"

"He was ambitious. He was impatient, and he was always short of money. He met a man just back from the colonies who gave him the idea of going to Africa and making his fortune there. He wanted my sister to go with him, but she refused. She had heard that the climate was very unhealthy, particularly for women."

"So he went alone?"

"Yes. He was gone for two years. He came back with his pockets bulging with money. But he spent it faster than he had made it. He had already begun to drink. When he was in his cups he would proclaim to the world that my husband was a mouse instead of a man. A real man, he used to say, would not spend his life selling insurance or postage stamps."

"He went back to Africa?"

"Yes, but the second trip was less successful. His letters were as boastful as ever, but reading between the lines we could feel that things were not going too well for him. Then two winters ago my sister Marthe died of pneumonia. We wrote the bad news to her husband who began drinking more than ever to drown his grief.

"A little later my husband and I moved here to Juvisy. For a long time we had been wanting to build our own home, and live closer to Paris. My husband had discovered he could make a comfortable living with his stamp business and had given up his insurance connections completely."

She spoke slowly, quietly, weighing every word. She seemed to be listening to the sounds from the bathroom.

"Five months ago my brother-in-law returned here without a word of warning," she continued. "Our doorbell rang one night and when I opened the door, there he was, weaving drunk. He gave me a funny look, and without even saying hello, how are you, he sneered and said, 'Just as I suspected.'

"At that time I hadn't the slightest idea what he was talking about. He didn't look well, and from the way he was dressed, he didn't seem too prosperous. In other words, it was not the brilliant homecoming he had enjoyed before, even if he had not been so drunk.

"He came in and for a few minutes talked a lot of incoherent nonsense. Neither of us could make out what he meant. Suddenly he got up and said to my husband, 'You're not only a scoundrel but you're the king of scoundrels. Admit it, now.' Without another word he left. We had no idea where he went.

"A few weeks later he returned, still drunk. He said to me, 'Well, well, my little Marthe.' 'You know very well I'm not Marthe,' I told

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him; 'I'm Isabelle.' He put on his best sneer. 'We'll see about that some day, won't we?' he said. 'As for your blackguard of a husband who sells postage stamps—'

"I don't know if you understand what was happening, Monsieur l'Inspecteur, but we didn't at first. He wasn't crazy, exactly, although he certainly drank too much. But he had this fixed idea which we were slow to grasp. For weeks we didn't understand his threatening gestures, his sardonic smiles, his insinuations. Then my husband began to get threats by mail. Just one phrase: *I'LL GET YOU YET.*

"In a word," Maigret interrupted quietly, "your brother-in-law Combarieu for one reason or another got it into his head that his wife was still alive and that it was Auger's wife who had died of pneumonia."

It was a startling idea: twin sisters so alike that their parents had to dress them differently to tell them apart . . . Combarieu far away in darkest Africa, learning that his wife was dead . . . imagining on his return—correctly or not—that there had been a switch, that it was Isabelle who had died and that his own wife Marthe had taken her place in Auger's bed.

Maigret's eyes were half closed as he considered the situation. He puffed more slowly on his pipe.

"Life has been a nightmare for us these past months," Madame Auger continued. "The menacing letters became more frequent. Combarieu would stagger in here at all hours of the day and night, draw his revolver, point it at my husband, then put it away again and laugh. 'No, not yet,' he would sneer; 'It would be too good for you.'

"Then he took a room here in town so that he could torment us more often. He's as sly as a monkey, even when he's drunk. He knows very well what he is doing."

"He knew," Maigret corrected her.

"I'm sorry." She colored slightly. "You're right. He knew. And I don't think he was too anxious to get into trouble. That's why we felt fairly safe here. If he had killed Auger here in Juvisy, everybody would know that he was the murderer.

"My husband hardly dared leave the house. Yesterday, however, he simply had to go to Paris on business. I wanted to go along but he wouldn't hear of it. He took the first train out, the early express, hoping that Combarieu would still be sleeping off his wine and wouldn't see him leave, even though Combarieu had a room just opposite the railway station.

"He was wrong. In the afternoon he telephoned me to come to Paris and bring his pistol to a café in the Boulevard Saint-Germain.

"I could see that my husband had come to the end of his rope, that he wanted to settle things once and for all. He told me on the phone that he would not leave the café before closing time. I brought him his

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Browning. I also bought a revolver for myself. You must understand, Monsieur l'Inspecteur."

"I understand that you had made up your mind to shoot before your husband was shot. Right?"

"I swear to you that when I pressed the trigger, Combarieu was raising his gun to aim at my husband . . . That's all I have to say. I'll be glad to answer any questions you want to ask me."

"How is it that your handbag is still marked with the initial *M*?"

"Because the handbag used to belong to my sister. If Combarieu was right, if there really had been this switch he was talking about so much, don't you suppose I'd have made sure to change the initial?"

"In a word, you are enough in love with a man to—"

"I love my husband."

"I was going to say you are enough in love with a man, whether he is your husband or not, to—"

"But he *is* my husband!"

"You are enough in love with this man, meaning Auger, that you would commit murder to save his life or to prevent him from committing murder?"

"Yes," she said.

There was a faint noise at the door.

"Come in," she said.

At last Maigret cast eyes on the man who had been described so differently by so many witnesses—the man with the blue-black mustache, the patience of an angel, and the obstinacy of a mule. In his domestic setting, he was a great disappointment. After the young woman's declaration of love, the man impressed Maigret as despairingly commonplace, the very quintessence of mediocrity.

Auger looked about him uneasily.

The woman smiled and said, "Sit down. I've told the Inspector everything . . . *Your heart?*"..

Auger poked vaguely at his chest and said, "Seems all right."

A jury in the Court of Assizes for the Department of the Seine found Madame Auger not guilty on grounds of legitimate self-defense.

Every time Maigret has told about the case, he has always concluded with an ironic: "And that's the whole story."

"Does that mean," someone would always ask, "that you have reservations?"

"It means nothing at all—except that it is not impossible for a very commonplace little man to inspire a very great love, a passion of heroic proportions, even if he has a weak heart and sells postage stamps for a living."

"What about Combarieu?"

"Well, what about him?"

"Was he crazy when he imagined that his wife was not dead at all but was passing herself off as Isabelle?"

Maigret would shrug and mockingly declaim:

"A very great love! A grand passion!"

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And sometimes when he was in particularly good humor, perhaps sipping some fine old Calvados that he had warmed gently by holding the inhaler between the palms of his hands, he would continue:

"Is it always the husband who inspires these great loves and mad passions? And don't sisters often have the grievous habit of swooning over the same man? Remember that Combarieu was far away . . ."

Then, puffing great clouds of smoke from his pipe, he would conclude:

"Too bad the parents were dead, so we couldn't question them about the twins who couldn't be told apart. Anyhow, it was a fine day—The most beautiful spring day I ever saw. And I doubt if I ever drank so much on any one case. If you catch Janvier in an unguarded moment, he might even tell you we were surprised to find ourselves singing duets in the taxi coming back to Paris. And Madame Maigret has always wondered why I had a bouquet of violets in my pocket when I got home . . . What a Jezebel, that Marthe! Excuse me, I mean, that Isabelle!"

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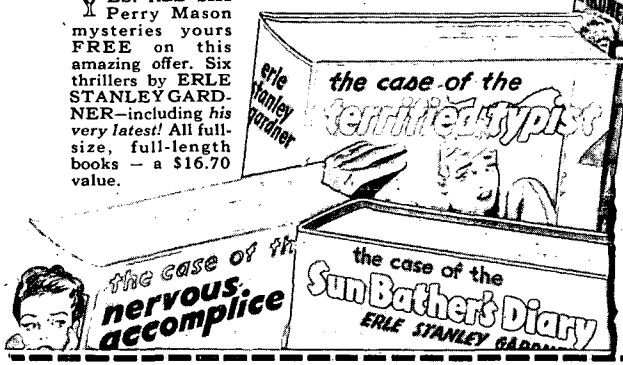

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